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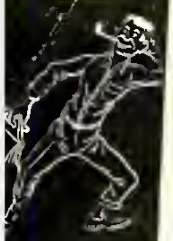

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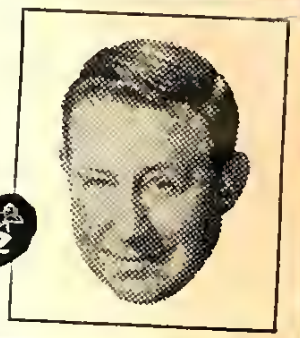

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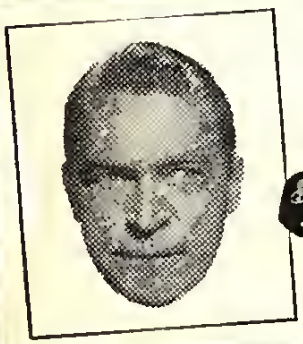

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SPACE SCIENCE

FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 1 No. 1 SPRING ISSUE

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Editorial Director	Lyle Kenyon Engel
Production	Marla Ray
Layout	David Hymes
Front cover	Tom Ryan
Illustrations	Bruce Minney

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THE MARTIAN CALENDAR

by CARL JACOBI

Hathaway wasn't exactly sick when he took over the sea house that June; but his recent illness had left its mark, and at thirty-eight he had changed from comparative youth to a grey-haired old man.

It was in the hope of revitalizing himself that he had selected this place at the head of Cooper's Cove. The house was completely modern. The grounds — roughly ten acres including the lower beach — were almost a unit in themselves, cut off by walls of unscalable granite; and there was a boathouse containing a dory, a catboat, and an inboard cruiser with which he could pass the long summer afternoons.

Only one feature marred the location. Perched like an eyrie at the top of the cliff, the house was separated from the beach by a staircase of seventy-nine steps, which in Hathaway's condition loomed an impossible barrier.

So it was not until mid-July, when he had regained some of his strength, that he saw the wreckage of the space ship at close range.

At beach level, however, Hathaway was disappointed. The ship, or what was left of it, looked puny and fragile, serving only to give credence to the stories he had been told before his arrival. Out there, resting precariously against a spine of granite, an up-ended black hull lay half submerged in the water like some giant robot's discarded toy. Green waves washed over it and sunlight glinted on its metal surface.

Two years ago Dr. Judson Ward, the former owner of the sea house, had taken off for Mars from this cliffside in that one-man vessel. What had happened was a matter of question. The world said Ward had ingloriously crashed in the cove after flying a distance of six hundred feet. Ward said he had left almost nine months before and that the bad landing, due to an error in navigation, had been made on his return.

At any rate he had survived the wreck. After his broken leg had mended, he had opened the second floor of the boathouse, displaying there a collection of alien artifacts which he insisted he had gathered during his stay on the red planet.

But the public didn't believe, the house was too remote, and the project ended in failure.

Now on this July morning Hathaway peered thoughtfully across the water at the wreckage. Turning, he retraced his steps to the white-painted boathouse,

made his way out the pier, and climbed the outside stairs to the structure's second floor.

The boathouse smelled of tar, wet rope and bilge water. He threw open the north window to the sea breeze and turned to Judson Ward's collection which was spread over five large tables along the walls.

If Ward had been a charlatan, as everybody said, he was certainly gifted with an active imagination. The collection looked like a surrealist's nightmare. There was a star-shaped piece of black plastic with a hole through its center that constantly changed color: from red to yellow, to violet, and back to red again. There was a thin-sided thing that resembled a coffee can but was so heavy Hathaway couldn't lift it from the table. There was a long elliptical cylinder covered with soft fur with an eye at one end that blinked when you touched it. And there was the calendar!

The lower section of the calendar was a large ten-inch date-pad, commonplace except that the sheets were not divided into months but numbered consecutively, one through 687. Above the pad was a picture set deep in a wide metal frame. The picture showed a green meadow surrounded by a split-rail fence with several trees in the background and grouped lazily in the shade a dozen or more black and white cows.

No canals . . .

No red desert . . .

It struck Hathaway that this wasn't a Martian scene at all.

He picked up the calendar to examine it more closely; a whir of gears sounded, and a number of date sheets dislodged and fell to the floor. Simultaneously a curious change took place in the picture. Clouds formed and zig zag streaks of lightning leaped across the painted sky. By seconds the scene in the frame grew darker; rain began to fall, and the cows huddled together for protection. At the same time a small oblong at the bottom of the panel opened and words appeared: *Forecast — Thunderstorms — Cooler.*

Hathaway replaced the calendar on the table. It was odd how far the human intellect would go when it attempted to support a contention.

Early next morning he got out the jeep and drove to Beachertown, the nearby village, to replenish supplies. He made his purchases: groceries, paint brush, and a caulking knife for work on the catboat and headed up the lonely road home. He was turning the hairpin bend before the sharp ascent that led to the sea house when the air above the rocky shoulder appeared to stagger momentarily, then settle back into position, as if a sheet of glass had been hung by the side of the road and someone moved that glass to and fro. Almost, he mused, as if

the space-time element — or whatever they called it — were out of juxtaposition.

Hathaway passed a hand over his eyes, and the effect faded away.

Reaching the sea house, he went into the kitchen and prepared lunch. For some reason the cream had soured and he had to drink his coffee black; but when he went out on the veranda his good spirits returned. Below him stretched the cove with its ellipse of beach and emerald waves creaming up on the sand. Far out to sea a triangle of white sail showed, and near the end of the promontory curlews soared and dived in the clear sunlight.

For half an hour he sat there, idly turning the pages of a magazine; then something caught his eye on the lower shore. It was a man clad in a light-colored suit, Panama hat and white shoes, striding along the beach close to the water's edge.

Hathaway smoked a denicotinized cigar while he mused over who the stranger might be or how he had come there. He watched him walk as far as the granite wall, occasionally stopping to skip a flat stone over the water, then retrace his steps toward the boathouse. A sudden storm, rising without warning from the southwest, drove Hathaway from the veranda then; and in the rush of closing windows against the wind, he forgot the matter. But he did remember the Martian calendar, and as thunder growled and lightning hopscotched across the sky, he had to admit grudgingly that the gadget had been correct in its predictions.

In the morning, as he stood by the window to do his limited daily dozen, he again saw the man in white on the lower beach. This time he gave in to curiosity and, hurrying down the high steps, came up to the stranger by the boathouse.

"You're on private property, you know," he said, coldly. "And if you don't mind, I'd like to know how the devil you got here."

The man was a good deal taller than he had appeared from above. He was in his early thirties with a round bland face and dark pleasant-appearing eyes. His mouth was crinkled at the corners as if he were constantly on the verge of smiling.

"There's a trail of sorts over there," he said, pointing. "But I'm sorry, if I got you down here just to tell me I'm trespassing.

"I come this way every other day or so," he continued, "Name's Cranston . . . Nigel Cranston. I've got a small place on the other side of the cove. By the way," he added as if on impulse, "what have you done with Judson Ward's collection?"

Hathaway nodded toward the boathouse. "It's still in there."

"Mind if I take a look at it again? Ward was a queer one; but when it came to inventiveness, he was sheer genius."

Hathaway shrugged and led the

way out the narrow pier. In the second floor room of the boathouse he stood by the door while Cranston moved past the collection, picking up one article after another.

Even in these simple movements there was a free flowing grace about the stranger that Hathaway at once disliked and envied. He couldn't help but contrast it with his own movements which since his illness had become stiff and clumsy.

Cranston moved from table to table, mumbling comments over the various articles. At last he stood before the calendar.

"Isn't that the damndest thing?" he said.

"It seems to be accurate at any rate," said Hathaway. "It forecast rain for yesterday, and we had rain."

"Day before yesterday," corrected Cranston. "Yes, Judson Ward would see to that. He was quite a mathematician, you know, among other things, and calendars were his hobby."

"So?"

"He had some crazy idea that the Gregorian calendar which we use today is but little better than the Julian calendar or the ancient Egyptian, and that all three of them are inferior to the system perfected by the Mayans."

"He probably made this thing to prove his point," suggested Hathaway.

"I don't think so." Cranston turned the frame panel over, pushed open a sliding cover and examined the mechanism-filled interior with a fountain-pen flashlight. "The date pad has numbered sheets to 687, which is equivalent to the number of days in the Martian year. "You'll note too that some of the date sheets show two moons, and that too is in agreement with the moons of Mars, Phobos and Deimos. Have you seen the writing on the back of this panel?"

Hathaway shook his head. "What does it say?"

"It says: *'Item 16. Calendar. Found in Temple of Nar ruins, Faye-Empo City, approximately forty-eight kilometers from landing site. Martian guide refused to touch it as he claimed it belonged to an upper caste Canalian, the legendary mystic race of the south desert country. According to guide, calendar has the ability to adjust its mechanism to be in accord with its surroundings.'*"

Cranston sighed. "Imagine Ward making all this stuff just to support his claim that he had been to Mars. He must have had intentions of getting there once though. That space ship out there is the real article."

"Did anyone see him crash?" asked Hathaway.

"No. A couple of early fishermen arrived just in time to prevent him from drowning. About this calendar . . . I'll give you twenty dollars for it."

"It's not for sale," said Hathaway.

Cranston did not ask again. He glanced once more at the inside mechanism, stood off and surveyed the pastoral scene in the panel and a few minutes later took his leave. Hathaway watched him go out the door, lightly descend the staircase and walk briskly across the beach.

On a morning a week later Hathaway, a basket under his arm, headed down a path into that district known as the East Woods. He had discovered the path some days ago and found that it led to a glade deep in the pines where blueberries grew in abundance.

As he strode along he thought over his life at the sea house. Each morning, it seemed, his days of rest and relaxation were paying off. He awoke with renewed vigor and a feeling of slowly returning youth, but by midafternoon his exuberance had passed and as the hours wore on toward evening he began to feel exhausted again.

Hathaway felt the stubble on his chin. There must be a certain quality too to the sea air that was conducive to growth. For years he had been a shave-every-other-day man; now seemingly as a part of the disturbed time that was effecting the entire property, a single cutting of his beard every twenty-four hours was not enough.

He reached the glade and began filling his basket. He worked slowly, enjoying the warmth of sunlight that filtered down through the trees and the balsam fragrance that filled his lungs like a tonic. Absently he noticed one patch where the berries were larger and more attractive than any other place. When he had been here before the patch had been green and undeveloped. It was odd, he thought, that it should have ripened in so short a time. Just one more facet of the mixed-up time element Hathaway had noticed.

Later he was enjoying a bowl of the berries at lunch on the veranda when a shadow fell across his table. Cranston stood on the veranda steps.

"Well, how's every little thing?" he said, entering and dropping into a chair.

Hathaway frowned in annoyance. "I feel fine."

"Glad to hear it. I thought you looked a trifle seedy yesterday, but that's beside the point. I stopped by to see if you had changed your mind about selling Ward's collection." Cranston drew out his wallet. "Fifty dollars and you can keep all except the calendar. That's all I care for."

"Sorry," said Hathaway. "It's not for sale."

"But it isn't doing you any good there in the boathouse."

"It's not for sale," said Hathaway again.

Cranston closed his wallet with a sigh and returned it to his pocket. "Okay," he smiled pleasantly. "No harm in asking." After that he asked Hathaway to show him through the house, left a half

hour later. When he had gone Hathaway got out his sprinkling can and began watering the tea roses which Judson Ward had let run wild. The flowers, however, were not of good quality. Like other things effected by time around the sea house, they seemed to stay in bloom only a short time before they withered and died.

That afternoon Hathaway continued his reading of Stegor's *A Self Reliant Man.* But his attention was half divided and he was wondering what Cranston could possibly want with the calendar when an errant thought struck him.

Suppose there was a value to the calendar he was not aware of. Suppose . . .

On impulse he descended to the boathouse. At the second floor door he drew up.

Someone apparently had tampered with the lock. A heavy implement had been jimmied under the hasp and pried upward, gouging the wood. The staple had held. Whether or not the marks were of recent origin Hathaway could not tell, but a single name rose before his eyes with damning finality Cranston. Who else would come here . . . would have access to the beach . . . ?

Fists clenched, Hathaway stood there a long moment while unrestrained anger swept through him. The nerve of the man . . . to believe he could get by with this. Hathaway let himself in the room and raised the window blind.

The picture in the calendar had changed. The dark overcast sky and the rain had given way to clear skies and bright sunshine. The cows were contentedly chewing their cuds, and below in the little oblong, words said, *Fair and warmer.*

He carried the calendar to the window, slid open the cover in back and squinted down at the internal mechanism. It was like nothing he had ever seen before: odd shaped bits of metal separated by small globes of transparent material, a world of minute circular and elliptical cogs and gears. He probed with his pencil at a series of plastic protective caps. And then his lips pursed in a low whistle.

Hathaway was no scientist, but he knew enough geology to recognize five Loren-Sedgemore crystals of approximately 250 milligrams each, unadulterated, ground and polished. Crystals first discovered spectroscopically in a reflected light analysis of Mars. Crystals whose power or intrinsic value had never been determined but whose number on Earth stood at a scant three hundred.

And Cranston had offered him fifty dollars for it!

Can't leave it here, he thought. Can't leave a thing with so much potential value alone in a boathouse with a man like Cranston around. There was no telling how much official circles would offer

for the calendar when it was known it contained these crystals . . .

He found a piece of sailcloth, carefully wrapped it about the calendar and carried it back to the house where he stored it on the top shelf of his bedroom closet.

The following day, being low again in supplies, he drove once more to Beachertown. As usual the night's sleep had done much to refresh him, and he was in good spirits until he entered the hardware store. There a grizzled oldster nodded and addressed him from around the stem of a blackened pipe.

"Hear you've taken over the Judson Ward place," he said. "Met your neighbor yet?"

"Cranston, you mean?"

"Mighty nice feller."

"I'm not so sure," Hathaway said, his eyes glinting "I think he's a crook. He tried to break into my place yesterday." Instantly he was sorry he had said that.

The man puffed a cloud of smoke. "Shoh, you must be mistaken. Cranston wouldn't do that. He's a nice young feller."

Hathaway bought a can of varnish and some nails and after cruising idly around the town, headed for home. When he turned into the hairpin bend he experienced the same sensation of shifting air before his windshield. He put on his glasses but the optical effect continued until he reached the sea house.

Twenty minutes after he entered, he felt sure that someone had been there during his absence. That it must have been Cranston and that he must have been after the calendar Hathaway was positive. Hatred for the man now swept over him like a cloud. He hated his smooth familiarity, his selfconfidence, his apparent perfect health. Hathaway thought of his own immediate past when, before his illness, he would have rolled roughshod over such a person without even troubling to learn his identity.

He drummed his knuckles thoughtfully on a table. So Cranston wanted the calendar, did he. Well, maybe the way should be made easier for him to get it. A hard smile passed across Hathaway's face. He went into the bedroom, took down the calendar and removed the sailcloth covering. Holding it so that it clearly could be seen, he descended to the boathouse, sure that prying eyes, perhaps aided by binoculars, were watching him.

He entered and after a moment's consideration hung the panel on a peg on the wall. From a toll chest by the door he took a bench saw, a coil of wire, and a pair of pliers. Then he crossed over to a raised platform where the compact light-plant that served the house was banging away noisily. After a moment's search he found the automatic cut-off

and pushed it to the side so that the motor would run continuously. Ten minutes later a well-concealed wire ran up from the spark plug to the metal frame of the calendar. With the saw Hathaway cut partly through the wooden railing which separated the second floor gallery from the center well that looked down on open water and the three boats below.

Finished, he stood back and visualized what would happen when Cranston entered. He would reach for the calendar, come into contact with the high voltage wires from the light plant motor throwing him against the railing, which, weakened by the saw, would give way and drop him into the open water below. A rather contrived but harmless trick which would teach Cranston a lesson and show that he wasn't dealing with a fool.

For the rest of the day Hathaway was in good spirits. He cooked and ate his dinner and played endless games of solitaire. Once, late in the evening, he thought he heard a short muffled cry from the direction of the lower beach. The sound was not repeated.

In the morning he deliberately waited until after breakfast before going down to the boathouse. As he had expected the door stood open; and he could see the splintered railing within.

An instant later Hathaway rocked backward as a strangled cry rose to his lips. Down in the well a huddled shape was half in the water, half draped grotesquely across the prow of the catboat. It was Cranston. His white shirt was stained crimson, and protruding from the front of it was a jagged foot-long splinter of wood.

The significance of what had happened filtered into Hathaway slowly. What he had meant to be a harmless prank had resulted in murder – premeditated murder! Slow panic welled over him.

He looked about wildly, as if expecting accusing eyes on all sides. He stood there swaying, jaw agape, while cold perspiration oozed out on him. Ice ran up and down his spine.

With an effort he steeled his nerves and forced himself to think rationally.

With no witnesses to dispute his word, who was to say that Cranston had not met his death by accident? Assuming the sawed-through railing were not noticed – and he could fix it so it wouldn't be – the authorities, when they came, would see nothing but the results of an unfortunate tragedy that was the fault of no one.

He waited to quiet his pounding heart, then began to remove the wire from the calendar and the electric light plant. He had a bad moment when at close range he looked down upon Cranston's body, and for an instant he fancied the dead man's lips moved, trying to speak to him. But a

second glance assured him the victim was beyond all help. Hathaway got a hatchet out of the tool box and worked several minutes on the railing, making the break appear to be a natural one. Then he went up to the sea house to call the sheriff.

In the absence of witnesses the inquest was a routine if sordid affair. A few villagers attended along with the victim's sister, his only relative, and the family practitioner of Beachertown. It ended with the statement: Death as the result of an accident, and after a few days life at Cooper's Cove Cove settled down to normalcy. Yet a nervous tension gripped Hathaway, and he could not suppress the feeling that he moved on the brink of some special event.

To quiet himself he took the motor cruiser for a short run out beyond the cove into the rolling swells of the Atlantic. Fighting the heavy seas, exposing himself to the salt spray cleared his brain for a time, but as he nudged the craft back into its mooring in the boathouse, the uneasiness returned. With it came a sudden urge to look once again at the calendar.

The picture in the panel was unchanged. Or was it? Hathaway thought for a moment he detected something else, a shifting of the background like the strange optical illusion he had noticed at the curve of the road on the way to Beachertown. But it was a fleeting effect, and reaching upward he took the calendar down and carried it to the window.

He slid open the sliding panel in back and looked down upon the five Loren-Sedgemore crystals, each with their protective caps. Abruptly he drew from his pocket a clasp knife and began to work away at the base of one of the crystals. He had it partially loosened on one side when suddenly there was a whir from inside the box like a released spring and a metallic grinding. There was a violet flash of flame, and Hathaway jerked his hand backward with his fingers tingling. Swearing, he closed the panel again and turned the calendar over.

As he peered down he saw that something had happened to the picture too. Singularly lacking in movement, there was a death-like rigidity about the cows in the meadow now, a breathlessness about the background that seemed to suggest the picture was in a state of suspended animation.

Down in the lower panel where the forecast had appeared, the oblong space had been replaced by an unmarked black surface.

There was no familiar ticking sound. The clock work mechanism was silent . . .

He spent a restless night, dreaming wild dreams of entering that meadow in the calendar and then finding it impossible to leave. The dreams were a prediction. When in late morning he headed for Beachertown, the jeep proceeded

sluggishly to the limit of his property and there halted. Hathaway got out, opened the hood and probed at the engine. At the end of five minutes he gave up in disgust and set off down the road at a walk. But he had not gone a dozen yards when that optical effect staggered the air about him. This time the sensation was a hundred times more severe, the road appearing to double within itself and extend into the distance in layers. Vertigo seized him; he halted, swaying.

The faulty vision — if indeed that's what it was — made it impossible for him to go on. He made his way back to the sea house where, as soon as he reached the veranda, the sensation passed. Though he had been gone a scant twenty minutes the moment he entered the living room he got the impression that someone had been there during his absence. And mad though it was, he could not repress the thought that the intruder was Cranston.

But Cranston was dead!

Yes, Cranston was dead. Hathaway smiled when he thought of how completely he had pulled the wool over the sheriff's eyes, how he had outwitted the coroner at the inquest. The railing had been given only a cursory examination, and no one had questioned his implication of an accident. He thought also of the Martian calendar and how it had changed his life during the past days. And he thought of the Sedgemore crystals and what he would do with the money when he sold them. Buy another house — in the city probably. No, not a house, not in the immediate future at any rate. He had had enough of living alone.

Abruptly there stole over him a mental cloud, dulling his perception, leaving him in a kind of dream world wherein his movements were stiff and mechanical. Like some metal-jointed robot he rose slowly to his feet, left the veranda and descended the steps to the boathouse. As he opened the door and stepped across the threshold he saw the calendar still hanging on its peg on the far wall. He stood there, gazing at it, eyes unblinking, hands hanging stiffly at his sides. Then, a step at a time, he crossed to the tool box, took out saw, pliers and wire. That his actions now were completely repetitive he was fully aware; yet he completely lacked the mental and physical stamina to change them. He hooked the wire to the light plant motor, led it concealed up the metal frame of the calendar and cut partly through the railing with the saw. After that he left the boathouse and climbed to the sea house.

His brain was whirling. Was he going mad or was this some wild dream from which he would awaken to laugh at his fears?

As the day slowly waned, he sat on the veranda, playing endless games of solitaire; he won and he lost. He played "Canfield," "four-corner-build-up," "English

Joker," and "King in the Counting House." At the completion of each game he flip-shuffled with all the dexterity of a practiced gambler. Yet with each turn of the cards he realized as through a mental veil that he had played those identical cards in their identical positions once before.

At five o'clock he cooked and ate his supper. And here again, as he munched fried chicken, celery and olives and drank coffee, he was aware that his actions were completely repetitive. As darkness set in, he returned to his solitaire games, playing without pause until shortly after nine o'clock when a muffled cry from the lower beach cut through the warm summer night. Hathaway listened, but the sound was not repeated.

In the morning he deliberately waited until after breakfast before going down to the boathouse.

All the way down the high stairs he was conscious of a sense of brooding disaster, of a cloak of doom that wrapped itself slowly and tightly about him. He found himself counting the steps as he descended: fifty-five, fifty-six, fifty-seven. As he approached the boathouse an overpowering repugnance held him back.

At the boathouse door he came to a halt, hands and legs trembling, while his brain spun crazily, rejecting answers. Was it not true that life moved along a circular channel and eventually passed the same mileposts it had moved by a previous time? Did not some scientists postulate that space time progressed in a series of gigantic arcs, revolving from a common hub, from the curve of which another curve could be seen in complete similarity?

Hathaway's hand moved toward the door latch. But even before he swung the door slowly open he knew what he would find inside. And he knew too what he would find when he opened the door on the morrow; the hideous horror which would confront him, the senseless tragedy which would wring his soul, the terrible moments and hours of that terrible period of his life which would be repeated again . . . and again . . . and again . . .

THE NEW WORLD TO CONQUER

by ADAM CHASE

Janus saw the green of a continent spread out below him like a great carpet. Half-conscious of the debarkation orders blaring from the loudspeakers behind him, he eased the spaceship down upon a lush meadow.

The meadow rolled evenly in all directions, except in the east, where it was sliced off abruptly by the pale brown of a strip of beach, and a hundred yards further, the roaring surf of a nameless ocean.

Between the meadow and the beach — glinting in the sunlight like a questioning eye — a city!

Janus set the ship down not two miles from the city. He slipped easily out of his seat and almost collided with Captain Harkness as the big man entered the control room.

"Good landing, Janus," he said. "Everything's ready inside. This is our fifteenth world in the past two years. Fourteen landings, fourteen conquests. Fourteen more worlds for the Federation. This time it won't be so easy."

"This time," Janus agreed, "it will be a race. The Otherlings aren't far behind, are they, sir?"

"Um," Captain Harkness considered. "We spotted their ship five days out. I don't know if they've seen us. Of course, they're headed here one way or the other; and if it means fight, then fight them we will."

Gray-haired old Lucas entered the control room. "Aye, Cap'n," he said. "Humans and Otherlings, all over the galaxy. Every new world has a choice: live under human rule or under the Otherlings. Really no choice at all — whoever gets there first does the taking."

Captain Harkness seemed a little dissatisfied with his astrogator. Yet he knew that despite his softness and antiquated ideals Lucas was perhaps the best astrogator in the Earth Federation. Well, let him be soft. What did it matter? Janus would lead the landing party, and for all Captain Harkness cared, Lucas could go along or stay within the *Icarus* as he saw fit.

Chafing at the delay, Janus watched the meteorological technicians enter the airlock with their instruments. They returned in a few moments, and the chief technician saluted Janus respectfully.

"Gravity nine-tenths earth norm," he said. "Atmosphere — .24 oxygen, .74 nitrogen, .02 rare gasses and CO_2. Present temperature Fahrenheit plus 68 degrees."

Janus saluted curtly and whistled softly to himself. A second earth, this planet half way across the outer fringe of the galaxy! It might have looked like earth, although Janus couldn't be sure. He hadn't seen his native planet since

the Federation had sent him to Spaceman's School on Algol IV. He hadn't seen the sun even as a pale star in the last five years. He hadn't seen a human female since that night on Deneb IX in the Spaceman's Cafe. It wasn't that he minded particularly — psychological conditioning had taken care of Janus's animal traits. He was a machine of conquest now: he had to be. For two-hundred years the galactic conflict had been raging. Humans and Otherlings — the laughable part of it was that Janus had never seen an Otherling. He only knew what his superiors told him. Man must conquer or be conquered. The Federation sent hundreds of ships like the *Icarus* cruising the star trails of the galaxy, in a mad race against the conquering Otherlings. "If we own more of the galaxy than they do when war comes," Captain Harkness had often told his lieutenant, "we'll win. If we don't —"

And Janus, the psychologically-conditioned machine for conquest, lived by the wisdom of that statement. Let the Otherlings come, Janus thought as he prepared for the initial exploration. When they do, this planet would be under earth's thumb.

Through the airlock and out upon the green sward of the new world Janus led his men. The cloying scent of vegetation was like some strange sweet perfume to his nostrils: the *Icarus*' hydroponic oxygenation was merely a pale remembrance of the heady smells of life.

Janus smiled without knowing why. Perhaps the grass felt good underfoot. Perhaps after long weeks of confinement it was just pleasant to see the graying haze of a distant horizon. Perhaps —

Janus started. There ahead of them, coming from the direction of the city, a group of figures! At this distance, Janus couldn't tell what they were. His mind had been conditioned, however. Galactic conquest is a strange thing: you come to accept the fact that there are as many different forms of life as there are planets in the universe. And so Janus waited, his interest aroused more keenly by what possible means of resistance the inhabitants might offer, than by what manner of vessel their life-force occupied.

Closer came the figures. Janus squinted in the sunlight. Bipeds! Upright bipeds. A planet so like earth, and the inhabitants —

By now the figures were as close to Janus and his little party as Janus himself was to the *Icarus*. He turned to old Lucas, who had accompanied him:

"By the Milky Way," he roared, "they're human, Lucas!"

Lucas nodded eagerly, then smiled. "Aye, lad, human they are — and human women. This will be a strange conquest."

Lucas was right. Janus saw half a dozen women approaching their position. In spite of the psychological conditioning, his pulses

leaped. Five years, and women again. Pretty, too, every one of them, although Janus found it difficult to tell. He had hardly any standards to judge by. At times he had envied those men back on earth who could not pass the rigid requirements of the Spaceman's School, those men who led normal lives as in the days of old. They knew their women. They knew —

"Who are you?" one of the women asked, in archaic English!

"English!" Janus gasped. "You speak English!"

"Of course we speak English," the woman told him. "Why shouldn't we speak English? We're from earth originally. A thousand years ago. You must be from earth. You must —" Then she frowned. "Why, what *are* you?"

She had looked at Janus closely, at the dark suit of leatheroid, at the long lean strength of his figure, at the light growth of beard on his face.

"What am I?" Janus repeated the question. "Why, a spaceman of the Federation, of course. One of a million men out in space to —"

The woman held up a slim hand. "Men? What is men?"

"Well —" began Janus. Then he saw the girl closely. Psychological conditioning slipped away. She stood facing Janus easily, almost as tall as he was, a sun-bronzed maiden, a woodland nymph in short gold tunic and kirtle, bare arms supple and smooth, legs bared half way up the thighs, high-breasted and proud-lipped, with eyes questioning even as the distant gleam of the city had questioned.

Janus felt uncomfortable. How does one act in the presence of a woman? A beautiful woman?

"What is men?" the girl repeated, smoothing a fold of her tunic in the light breeze, careless of the half-exposure of limb and body.

"Surely," this was old Lucas, "you know what men are. You were born out of the union of a man and a woman."

"Man and woman," the girl pronounced the second noun easily enough, but she savored the first word with her tongue like some strange new fruit. Then she laughed. "Why," she said, looking Janus thoroughly up and down, "I know what you are. Somewhat bigger, perhaps, but you're a drone. A drone!"

She said the word like you might say insect. Boldly, she grasped Janus' upper arm in a strong, slender hand. "You are strong-muscled, drone; not soft like the others I have known. Of course, I myself am not a breeder, but a warrior. Still, I have known drones. In times of festival —"

Janus backed away, aware of a warm flush on his neck and face. The contact of that woman's hand had been pleasant! He cleared his throat and became businesslike. If all that stood between them and conquest were these six slim maid-

ens, it would be incredibly easy.

"We have come," Janus advised the girl, "to bring you the benefits of earth's advanced civilization. We have come to include your world as a colony —"

"You will do no such thing!" the girl cried. "Long ago — a thousand years — we were an early colony of earth. But distance made the colony impractical. Earth left. We've lived in isolation ever since, breeding just enough women and drones to keep our culture thriving. We want nothing to do with you and your plans of colonization."

The way the girl said it, she seemed to think she could do something about it. Janus shrugged. "There's no need to make this unpleasant. If you will agree, or if you will take us to someone who has authority —"

"I will not agree," the girl said cooly. "And I have authority enough."

"Please, miss," Janus began, remembering dimly his early training. "Whether we use force or not is up to you. Six slim girls can hardly —"

The girl laughed haughtily. "Ten overmuscled drones and a ship from space frighten us not. If you leave now, at once, we will permit you to return to your ship. If you stay —"

"We will stay," Janus said firmly, annoyed that he had to banter words with the girl.

Her answering smile was misleading. "Very well," she said, softly. Abruptly, she leaped forward. This was the last thing Janus had expected. With one strong, slim arm she circled his neck, pivoting him about so that he stood as a shield between herself and the other earthmen. In her other hand she held a long, thin dagger, pushing the point threateningly against Janus's back.

"Drone!" she hissed furiously. "Yes, you'll stay — alone." Janus could feel the point of the knife pricking his skin through the leatheroid jacket. "I'll give your ship just one day to leave. You die if it doesn't."

Janus didn't struggle against the arm around his throat. He somehow knew the girl would use her knife if she had to.

"If they do leave?" Janus panted.

"Then I give my word that you will not be killed. Unfortunately, I must hold you as assurance. Your life here would not be difficult. I rather imagine you will be a most highly favored drone."

Janus relaxed in her grip. Then suddenly he kneeled and lunged forward. With a little scream of surprise, the girl hurtled over his shoulders and fell on her back amidst Janus's companions.

"Seize him!" she cried.

Five slim maidens leaped forward, and ere Janus could rise again, five pairs of arms held him firm. But the situation was an impasse. One of Janus's men picked up the knife and held it at the

throat of the girl Janus had thrown. Janus smiled at his own lack of conditioning. He knew he never could have held a knife at that lovely throat.

Janus thought fast. He realized they could expect no additional aid from the ship. His ten men were the invasion party; the rest, mere technicians. Earth science had given the weapons that could conquer a world to these ten men, but while Janus remained a captive, his men would do nothing. On the other hand, the maidens who held him seemed loath to do anything more than that: their own leader felt the point of a knife at her throat. Janus knew that he needed time.

"Take us to your city," he commanded.

The girl smiled. "You are in no position to tell me what to do," she advised.

Janus felt anger. "Nor are you in a position to refuse my command."

"Well, drone, I won't refuse it, although I will not take it as a command. You have suggested we take you to the city. Very well, it is a good suggestion for the time being under one condition."

"What condition?"

"That all those strange mechanical devices your men carry at their waists are left in the grass here."

"Except for this one," one of the bolder girls said, removing Janus' disint gun from his belt.

"Will you come, weaponless?" the leader demanded.

Janus nodded and told his men to throw down their weapon belts. Muttering, they loosed their belts and dropped them to the ground, gun clattering against gun. The leader of the girls signaled, and Janus felt five pairs of arms release him. He got to his feet and saw that the sixth girl stood also, resheathing her knife. One of his men darted suddenly for the pile of weapons in the grass; but before he covered half the distance, the girl had stuck out her foot and tripped him. He fell awkwardly upon his face; and the girl would have leaped after him with her knife, but Janus held her back.

"He'll not do that again," he said. "That's enough fighting for now." He strode forward in the direction of the city, a mass of pale gleamings half way to the horizon.

He frowned as they went. Five earth days ago they had spotted the Otherling ship out in space, heading for this planet just as surely as Janus knew he was heading for the city. If the Otherlings came and found earth's landing force in a state of semi-captivity — and Janus smiled in spite of himself — they were being held in semi-captivity by girls of their own race, while alien beings hovered nearby planning conquest.

Three days later, Janus hardly

thought of the Otherlings. Perhaps if he had read in the long dead literature of his race the story of the Lotus Eaters, he would have remembered. Of this he knew nothing. He only knew that the city — N'ashington it was called — gleamed within with a sparkle that even the graceful exterior of spires and towers and minarets of delicate plastic could not match. It sparkled for a new Janus. It sparkled with — women!

Perhaps Janus did not realize the change in himself. But his psychological conditioning, except for a certain shyness, had slipped away utterly, as if it had never been a part of the man. He found a new side of his personality — a side that had a definite need for the companionship of women: he found that need had both been born and satisfied in N'ashington. N'ashington, the city, — not that alone. It had been born and satisfied in Narla.

Narla, slim warrior-maid! Narla who, when she had ascertained that Janus was indeed more than a drone, had become as shy with him as he was with her. Narla who had shown Janus happiness as he had never known it, with her voice, her smile, her hand.

Narla and Janus — almost like Adam and Eve on a faraway world — the first man and the first woman rediscovered, with the impending arrival of the Otherlings so far in the back of Janus's mind that he thought of it only as a half reality. Back on the *Icarus,* it was vastly more than a half reality to Captain Harkness. The disappearance of his invasion party had alarmed the officer. Yet he could not send out untrained technicians to discover what had happened to his trained fighting men. He waited.

And in N'ashington, Janus and his men played and danced and sang with their slim maidens. Over it all, old Lucas smiled like some benevolent gargoyle. Long and long ago on earth he remembered seeing men and women such as these. He had thought never to see them again. By the Milky Way, but he was old! He would be perfectly content to stay in N'ashington the few remaining years of his life, and watch the young people fashion a new world for themselves.

The Otherlings? Somewhere in the hidden recesses of his mind he recalled the menace of the Otherlings. Funny how you could forget so easily when something new and pleasant —

"Narla," Janus asked, "what do we do today? Yesterday, your games; the day before you showed me the city itself. What do we see today?"

"I will take you to see the drones, drone of mine," Narla said with a smile.

On the outskirts of the little city was a great building, one huge edifice of plastic, long and flat, covering half the width of the city. To this they made their way on foot. Janus entered with his guide

and was startled by what he saw. *He saw* men — or creatures which might have been born to be men but had never had the chance — small fat creatures with vapid smiles and vacant stares.

"They are drugged from birth, our drones," Narla explained.

"Why? I mean, how did this come about?" Janus asked. "On earth — wherever humans are, except here — the man commands the woman, yet he uses no drugs."

"Long and long ago," Narla mused, "the drones fought wars. Women grew tired of fighting. They remained not idle. The drug reversed the position of the sexes. Now we are dominant, using drones for breeding alone.

"I wonder now, my Janus-drone, if it were not unwise? You are different, what our drones might have been, what — what I have wanted without knowing all my life." She blushed, like any shy maiden of earth, and Janus blushed with her!

Later, they met Lucas in the drone-ranch. The astrogator saw Janus and Narla walking towards him hand in hand. "Isn't this far better, Janus," he observed with a wink, "than fighting the Otherlings?"

Janus jumped as if he had been struck. "The Otherlings!" he roared, out of the pleasant lethargy. "They couldn't be more than a day away!" Back over him fell the old conditioning, like a cloak. He released Narla's trembling hand. She knew not why she trembled; she only knew that her Janus himself trembled with a remembrance of something violent.

"What troubles you, lord?" she asked humbly, suddenly feeling that Janus was in command, and liking the sensation.

Janus grunted, "You couldn't help, Narla. Other invaders approach N'ashington. Not men."

"Women?" Narla demanded, naively.

"Not women, either," Janus assured her. "Otherlings. Alien creatures battling earth for dominion of the galaxy. They are near, very near. If they land now, and we sit and dream in your city —"

"My Janus," Narla said, "our women have showed kindness, affection — have showered it upon you to make you forget your ideas of conquest. There are many ways to fight a war. Now you talk again —"

"You have done what?"

"We have — but no. You do not understand. In the beginning it was that way. But not now. Janus, I — I like you. I — there's another word, long and long ago my people used it. I —"

"A subterfuge!" Janus cried. "You have been entertaining us in the hope that we might forget our mission. Forget, and if we had, the Otherlings would take your world as surely as I can —"

"I know not of your Otherlings, my Janus. I know —"

Outside, a wailing, gentle at first, like the distant blowing of

winds of March. Steadily louder it grew, until a screaming pounded in the ears of Janus.

"A spaceship," he muttered. "The Otherlings!"

Through an exit he leaped, and out into the city streets. Evidently the spaceship had landed nearby, but Janus could not at first see it. The streets of N'ashington never ceased to amaze him. All his life Janus had seen practically no women, at least since his spaceman's training had begun so many years ago. Now the streets were filled with women. They went about their business in the warrior garb of Narla, or in the blouse and breeches that designated the workers, or an occasional plump girl in the shapeless gown of a breeder. Nowhere did Janus see a male. All these were kept in the drone cubicles of the long flat building. Of children there were surprisingly few, all female.

Narla had followed Janus out into the street, and behind her ran old Lucas. Janus could feel his heart beating wildly. All his life he had been trained to fight against the menace of the Otherlings, yet the incredible part of it was that he had never seen one. Now in the city an Otherling ship had landed.

A scream from around the corner of the drone-building! Janus plunged forward, ignoring the fact that he had no weapon, Narla and Lucas still at his heels.

The ship stood in a little square. Utterly round it was and darkly polished like some strange globe of obsidian. Around it milled a group of warrior-maids. A port had opened in the smooth skin of the spacecraft; and out of it, solemnly, trooped a horde of — Otherlings. Their appearance, Janus realized, had justified that scream.

Janus's conquest-trained mind had seen many weird creatures up and down the star trails of the galaxy. With a shudder he could remember the silicate life of Fomalhaut II, or the flowing, protean beings of a Sirian planet. But these Otherlings —

The trouble, Janus knew, was that they looked like men.

Like dreadful parodies of men, rather. Their skin was glossy jet with just a trace of midnight blue, like water of ocean depths under starlight. And they looked like men.

Like men and yet unlike them! No two Otherlings were the same. Each seemed a distinct mutant in his own right, so that Janus saw a nightmare of shapes before him — three-armed man with long, boney forearm protruding from breastbone; two-headed man; Cyclops; man hopping ridiculously on legless trunk. Travesties all, yet their utter solemnity, their meticulous filing out from the port, added a certain grimness to that travesty.

"Attempt nothing violent, please!" Janus felt that thought course into his brain and saw by their expressions that the warrior-maids felt it also. The Otherlings

had mastered telepathy. And what else? If nature had seen fit to give each Otherling a particular shape which would have confounded Darwin, what other powers did they possess? Were they superior fighting machines to men? Janus suddenly wished he had his disint gun to try on their jet hides.

No he didn't. Odd, but suddenly he didn't. Why should he fight? He obviously didn't feel like fighting. There was nothing to fight about. The masters had come from far across the galaxy to impose their rightful dominion on inferior beings. Odd that a moment ago he should have felt like fighting.

Janus knew that his mind was being played with.

They were strong, these Otherlings! Their weapon, one which might well conquer the galaxy for them — mind control. Now Janus thought against the desire for peace. He fought it. He felt his heart pounding furiously, felt beads of sweat form on his forehead and course in tiny rivulets down his face. Still he fought.

Yet what for? Who was he to fight against the masters of the galaxy when peace would be so much more pleasant?

Insidiously, those thoughts crept into Janus's mind. He tried to chase them. He attacked them angrily with his will. Then, shuddering, he realized he was losing.

Glancing about, he could see that the maidens had already lost. They stood in little groups, uncertainly, waiting for further unspoken command. Could the conditioned hostility towards the Otherlings in Janus and Lucas make a difference? It was hard to tell. Janus saw the old man sweating and struggling the same as he was. This, the first meeting between humans and Otherlings, could be a portent: Janus had to beat down the clamor for surrender in his mind!

"I feel evil!" Janus heard the thought inside his brain. "Who here is alien? Who resists?"

Janus watched in awful fascination as Narla pointed a finger first at Lucas and then at himself. Narla, like her companions, in a few seconds an unquestioning minion of the Otherlings!

"Seize them for examination," the toneless command appeared in Janus's mind. Not a one of the Otherlings advanced a step, and for an instant Janus wondered why.

Apparently they abhored any form of physical activity. They seemed perfectly content to have Narla and her maidens carry out their commands. Which was precisely what the beautiful girl had set about to do.

She walked slowly towards the two earthmen. Janus thought fast. Elsewhere in the city, his ten fighting men were relaxing for the first time in years. Quite possibly they did not know the Otherlings had arrived. From that quarter he could expect no help. Besides, the Otherlings might conquer their

minds, as they had the minds of Narla and her companions.

Janus realized that the insistent clamor for peace and surrender which had fought its way into his brain was gone. For this he was glad: it meant the Otherlings gave their telepathetic orders by virtue of a solid, group enterprise. It meant that while they were engaged in commanding Narla and her maidens to conquer these aliens, they could not exercise control over himself and Lucas. It meant —

Janus felt the wind knocked out of him. Lost in thought, he had hardly been aware of Narla. The girl had leaped upon him and bore him to the ground with a surprising surge of strength. She was upon him like a wildcat now, attempting to subdue him; and he could see, off to one side, old Lucas grappling with a few of the warrior-maids.

For a brief moment, Janus hardly fought. He still couldn't bring himself to hurt Narla. Yet if he didn't . . . He could see more of the girls approaching, ready to aid their leader. Again in his mind, tonelessly: "Seize them!"

The voiceless order brought Janus out of his lethargy. He must not be captured! It was true that the Otherlings did not know he was a human being, a member of a breed of arch-enemies who battled them for galactic control. If they caught him —

He rolled over furiously, and for a few brief seconds battled there in the dust with the lithe strength of Narla. With hands and legs and weight she held him down, but he threw her off and pulled himself clear. With an oath he hurled himself into the group pressing Lucas to the floor and tore arms and hands away from him. For an instant they both stood clear, panting.

Then a score of the warrior-maids surged towards them, panting. Head down, grasping Lucas's arm in a powerful grip, Janus plunged forward. He met the wall of female bodies and plunged through. He ran, pulling Lucas along, out of the city and over the carpet of grass which led to the *Icarus*.

Into his mind again, a command, not meant for him: "Kill them!" The Otherlings had lost patience. Janus glanced over his shoulder. A group of warrior-maids had come to the fore, each armed with a javelin. They loped easily after the earthmen, and some began to throw their slim weapons.

Most of them fell short, but some came much too close for comfort. Janus's breath came in burning sobs. Could he outdistance these fleet huntresses? He had to.

Lucas stumbled once and fell. "Save yourself!" he wheezed at Janus. "I'd only slow you down. Get to the *Icarus* and —"

"Shut up!" Janus roared, dragging the older man back to his feet and pulling him along.

All their lives these maidens of N'ashington had spent in the outdoors, hunting and gaming. They could run! But Janus had been conditioned on Algol IV. He had spent weeks in a gravity-field twice as strong as earth's, conditioning his muscles superbly. The Federation had trained his body as well as his mind for just such an emergency.

Slowly he outdistanced his pursuers, half dragging, half carrying the exhausted Lucas. Before long the Otherlings realized their quarry was escaping, for a new thought entered Janus's mind, this time directed at him: "Stop your flight!" the voice which was yet not a voice ordered him.

Janus slowed. Why not stop? After all, his legs had begun to tire, his breath scalded his throat, and the burden of Lucas made his arms feel like two lead weights. Why not stop?

He battled the thought and won. With distance the powers of the Otherlings seemed to decrease. Janus ran ahead again at full speed. The temporary break was all he had needed, for while the Otherlings had directed their commands of surrender at him, they had lost control of the warrior-maids; and they stood some distance behind now, resting upon the staffs of their javelins.

Ahead, Janus saw the *Icarus,* a huge silver dart in the emerald grass. From within, the two running figures had been spotted, for hardly had Janus reached the airlock when it had been sprung. With Lucas, he plunged inside.

It was later. Janus had told his story to a thoroughly astonished Captain Harkness. They sat in the control room now, along with Lucas – three fighting men amidst a group of scientific technicians who had not been trained to fight.

Captain Harkness scratched his head thoughtfully. "We three," he said, "must battle the Otherlings. Here on the ship we have only scientists, men who know no more of fighting than do babes –"

"Yes," Janus agreed, "and our men in N'ashington are an unknown quantity. They may be utterly under the control of the Otherlings. At best they are helpless, perhaps unaware of the coming of the Otherlings, although that is unlikely. At worst, they may be dead."

Lucas nodded slowly. "At least, lad, we have seen the Otherlings. We now know they are powerful, perhaps stronger than we are. But it is good to have seen them."

"What are they?" Janus demanded.

"From what you've told me," Captain Harkness replied, "I'd say they were men, after a sort."

"Aye, Cap'n, they're men, basically," old Lucas agreed. "Men and yet not men. Originally, perhaps, they were *homo sapiens,* same as we are, but it is not impossible to assume their home planet lacks the ample protection from cosmic radiation that the

heaviside layer gives our own earth. The result, well, you've seen it, Janus — an incredibly divergent species of mutants which may not breed true. Their telepathy" — here he shuddered, remembering the strength of the toneless words which had battered down his will like a sledge-hammer — "their telepathy is one variation that does breed true. It's their chief weapon. Physically, we may expect them to be weak. But if they can use the girls of N'ashington as their fighters, we're terribly outnumbered."

Captain Harkness laughed. "Girls? I'm not frightened, Lucas."

"Well, you should be," the older man answered. "Spears can kill, no matter who throws them. And those women are strong, not having known the superiority of men until recently." He winked at Janus who blushed, remembering the happy days with Narla.

A buzzer sounded. Captain Harkness flicked a switch and the face of the chief meteorologist appeared on a viziscreen. "Sir," the man began, "all the technicians have held a meeting. If we're needed to fight —"

Janus saw the Captain's eyes grow misty with emotion. Ill-trained for the job, these men were ready to pit their puny strength against a menace which was hardly more than a name to them!

"By Sirius!" Captain Harkness muttered. "There is some strength in numbers. Armed with disint guns they'd be a match —"

"You'd kill Narla and her maidens?" Janus demanded.

The Captain frowned at him. "If necessary, of course I would. We're in space to conquer for earth ahead of the Otherlings. Simultaneous conquest is impossible. If we meet them, as we did now, and if their offensive weapon is a band of savages —"

"They are not savages," Janus declared, seeing in his mind's eye Narla being rayed down by a disint gun.

"Nevertheless," Captain Harkness stood firm, "if we must, we will kill them."

Of plans they had none. Mechanically, Janus went about the routine of arming his new army of forty technicians. He schooled them briefly in the use of the disint gun. He distributed the weapons. He gave almost no advice, moving about his task mechanically.

Captain Harkness stood facing his crew in the inner lock chamber, a proud man. "Here on the *Icarus*," he said, "I am in charge. Once we step foot outside, you are to obey Mr. Janus as you have been trained to obey me. Men, I want to thank you for your eagerness to help us in —"

He cleared his throat once or twice and reddened. A hard man? Janus laughed softly in spite of himself: Federation conditioning was nothing more than a surface polish.

Janus led them outside. His idea was simply to approach N'ashing-

ton and let whatever manifested itself there dictate his course of action. He still did not know what he would do in the event they had to fire on Narla and her maidens. Without thinking the thought tangibly, he knew he loved the girl. Yet he knew that earth and the Federation might hang in the balance. Years of star-roving for the Federation had brought him here to this planet so like the earth where he had found something new and wonderful and — and he might have to destroy it!

The toneless voice of the Otherlings did not surprise Janus when it came. He almost had expected it. "Men of earth," he heard soundlessly, "we know you for what you are. We are ready. You will find that we have deadened your weapons. Therefore, if you will surrender —"

A trick, thought Janus. He aimed his disint gun at a spot of ground and fired. He cursed. Nothing happened. Somehow, the Otherlings had nullified their disint rays. Such a thing, Janus knew, was not impossible. On Algol IV he had been taught how to set up a dampening field. With this power in their hands, the Otherlings indeed seemed to control the situation.

Ahead Janus could see N'ashington, gleaming in the sunlight. Between it and his men — scores of the warrior-maids, trotting towards them rapidly!

"You'll never know if you could have brought yourself to kill!" Lucas cried. "They'll slaughter us like Saggitarian cattle."

Janus couldn't argue with that. Javelins and knives glinted in the sunlight. Nearer came the maids.

"Spread out and run!" Janus ordered his men. "Circle them, go through them, but run. Get to the city!"

He plunged forward, darting this way and that to present a difficult target. Not a hundred yards separated him from the maidens. In the lead he saw Narla, javelin poised. For a moment, Janus had an impulse to turn and run. But as he could not have killed the girl, so something in him said that she never would throw that javelin.

Nearer they came, and still Janus did not pause. Fifty yards away now, with death in her eyes, came the girl Janus loved. Her face showed no recognition, her features were frenzied with a death-lust planted by the Otherlings, yet she was beautiful. Her eyes singled Janus out. The bronzed right arm leaped up and back, poised to throw the javelin. So close now — and Janus could see a questioning furrow appear on her forehead, a flicker of recognition in her eyes.

To be replaced in an instant by the death-mask!

"Kill them!" he felt the insidious command of the Otherlings.

Narla's slim right arm began to arc forward, ready for the grace-

ful thrust that would send her javelin hurtling through the air at Janus. Still he waited, knowing now that she was so close that a miss would be unlikely. Once again, Janus thought he saw a trace of recognition in the eyes, but at point of death a man is in a position to see anything offering release. He called Narla's name and saw a smile appear at the corners of her mouth. A smile —

To be replaced at once by frenzy of murder!

"Kill them!" the voiceless command clamored.

Now Narla's arm shot forward swiftly. But in the fleeting instant necessary for her to release the missile, Janus still could see that frown of indecision. She followed through completely with the down-thrust.

She had buried her quivering javelin in the ground!

Breathless, she ran into Janus's arms, and he could feel the warmth of her trembling. Only for an instant she stayed thus, murmuring, "I almost killed you, my Janus." Then she wheeled about. "Drop your javelins! I, Narla, command you in this!"

The warrior-maids came on, intent upon Janus's technicians, scattered in flight about the meadow.

"Kill them!" ordered the Otherlings.

Scores of bronzed arms leaped up and back, posing deadly javelins in pre-flight.

"You will drop your javelins and wait!" Narla implored.

Janus blinked. One by one, the javelins fell! The girls milled about, unsure of themselves, the toneless voice yet clamoring for death. No one paid it heed. Suddenly, Janus did not know why, it became an expressionless, meaningless chant, a song of Druids where no Druids were worshipped — not meant to be obeyed.

"We've beaten them!" Janus cried.

"Not yet," said the Captain. "They may know how to fight, themselves."

At a dog-trot, they ran for the city. Halfway there, Janus's fighting men came out to meet them, explaining that the warrior-maids had held them captive until a few moments ago, when, suddenly, they had released them.

Came a dull roar and a loud whine — muted far-off peal of thunder and a savage gust of wind through dead branches. Atop a fountain of fierce jet-flame, the black sphere of the Otherlings' ship rocketed upwards until it was a tiny speck against the blue sky, until it disappeared.

"They're licked," Janus said wearily.

"Aye, lad, we have in truth beaten them."

"But how?" Janus seemed incredulous.

"With emotion, I think. It evidently is not a part of their constantly changing make-up. It is alien to them. Their commands

couldn't get through an unintentional barrier of emotion. Much as a hypnotist cannot command you against your will, so they could not tell us to do what our emotions revolted against."

"Emotion?" Janus still didn't quite understand.

"Simple emotion," Narla assured him, taking his hand. "My love for you, lord, and the love of my warrior-maids for their leader. Everywhere is love stronger than hate."

Captain Harkness said, jubilantly, "We have our weapon to fight the Otherlings now. We'll emote them out of existence!"

"Well," Janus said, "I may not go with you. It depends —"

"Upon what, drone of mine?" Narla wanted to know.

Janus kissed her lightly, then again. Then the lightness left his lips.

"No more drones in N'ashington?" he demanded.

"No, m'lord," Narla responded. "We'll destroy the drug."

"Normal men and women?" Janus insisted.

"Yes, m'lord."

Old Lucas laughed heartily. "Since Janus has decided to stay in N'ashington," he said, "I think I will remain with him. These young people need someone of an older generation to show them the ways of the old days. In my youth —"

Neither Janus nor Narla were listening.

WINDOW TO NOWHERE

by TEDD THOMEY

Hemp never knew exactly how it started. He was too busy getting the life beat out of him on a battlefield of white lines and black concrete.

The ball came winging over again, flat and deadly, and again it was too expertly placed. There was nothing Hemp's pumping legs and reaching tennis racket could do about it. A murmur of sympathy came from the grandstand as he missed the ball completely.

Like a priest giving the last sacrament, the umpire intoned over the loudspeaker: "Love, forty . . ."

Slowly, Hemp pushed his exhausted body back to the base line. He was a small man and this afternoon the hot Los Angeles sun had boiled the juices from him until he looked even smaller than usual. Around the edges of its deep tan, his face was pale. Water ran down from his short blond hair, glistening across his throbbing temples. His white T-shirt was soaked.

He put all he had into his service, a fairly hard ball with a lot of hop. Macmillan took it easily and the ball came blurring back, kicking up a cloud of chalk as it boomed into Hemp's backhand corner. Macmillan, the No. 1 player on the Coast, was at his best today.

Somehow Hemp got under the ball and boosted it back. Again and again he returned it, making miraculous retrieving shots, but finally his lungs were too burned out, his legs became too heavy and he popped the ball weakly into the net.

As the loudspeaker announced "Game, Mr. Macmillan," the grandstand applauded and a wave of nausea rolled upward from Hemp's belly. The court became darker, revolving giddily like a great black platter. He felt his blood pounding in his eardrums and caught a glimpse of the sea of faces in the grandstand as he swayed over toward the base line. He knew exactly what they were saying.

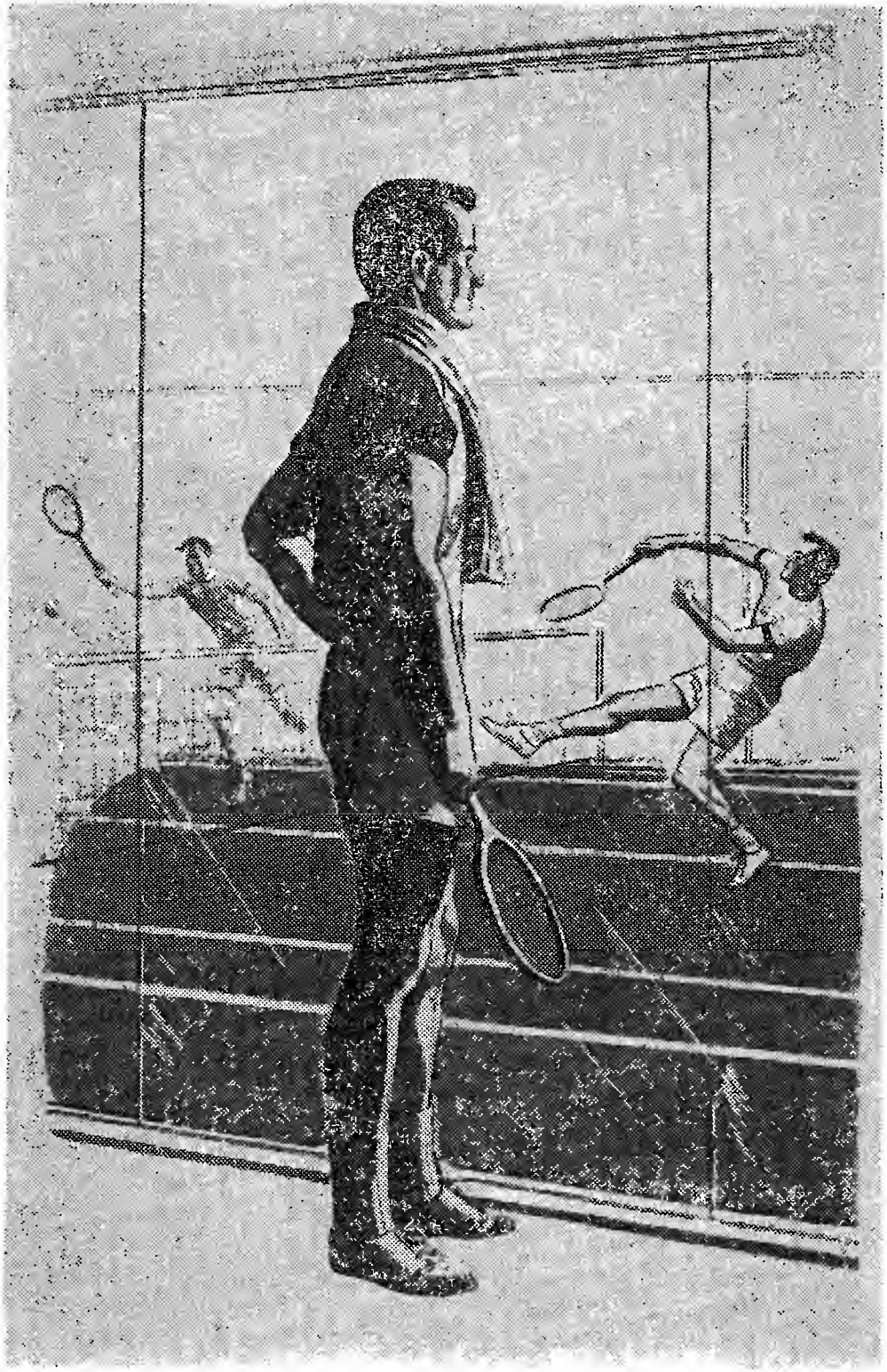
"Great little retriever, that Hemp. Great little retriever. Too bad . . ."

And it was true — that's what hurt. He was a great retriever — but that was all. It was a simple matter of physics. He just wasn't tall enough, he just wasn't big enough to blast the ball like a champion.

He knew that he'd lost the match.

He'd already dropped the first two sets and the score on this one — the deciding one — was 5-2. With Macmillan's big serve coming up next, there could be no doubt about the outcome.

Hemp's mouth twisted bitterly.



This was the first time he'd ever made it to the finals of a big tournament. Yesterday in the semi's, he'd come back from the edge of defeat time and again to beat Maberly, who'd been seeded No. 2. If he could have won today, there would have been invitations from other tournament committees — it would have meant the realization of a dream he'd worked at for three heartbreaking years. He would have given anything to win today.

The ball sped past him for a perfect ace.

Macmillan — tall, bronzed and cool — arched his back and served again. This time Hemp reached it, but he tried too hard and drove it long.

"Thirty, love . . ." intoned the loudspeaker.

On weak, hollow legs, Hemp swayed back to the base line again. He clamped a wet hand across his eyes. It was slipping away. The game was slipping away.

"Anything," he muttered through clenched teeth. "I'd have given anything to win today. . . ."

"Anything?" asked the loudspeaker.

Hemp looked up sharply at the umpire on his high chair at the sidelines.

"Anything?" the loudspeaker asked again, almost softly. It was a young woman's voice.

The umpire's plump lips had not moved. And Hemp knew there was only the one microphone for the loudspeaker.

The burning sun. His exhaustion. He wondered if he'd suddenly gone crazy.

"Yes, anything!"

This time it wasn't the loudspeaker. This voice was loud and defiant and Hemp recognized it as his own. It surprised him.

Quite abruptly, his knees gave way and he pitched headlong to the warm concrete. He was perfectly conscious and still clutching his racket, but his leg muscles would not respond and he lay there unmoving, listening to the whispered concern for him in the stands. Finally, two of the other players and a ball boy came and carried him off toward the locker room. He knew how sorry they must feel for him — this meant he was defaulting.

Inside the locker room, the odor of disinfectant tingled his nostrils. The players laid him easily on the smooth, varnished bench and left him.

After a while, feeling better, he sat up. As he turned to place his racket in his locker, he stopped. His hand and the red-lacquered racket halted in midair. In the place where there had always been a row of olive-drab, metal lockers, there was now a beautiful plate glass window as high as a man, as long as the entire wall.

For a long moment, Hemp stared out through the window at the two men playing on the center

court. He put a hand over his eyes. Took it away.

There was no doubt about it — the small man playing out there was Robert Hemp. As he watched, the small man ran toward the window to retrieve the ball. The resemblance was perfect. There was his butch-cut hair, yellow-bleached by the sun, and the nick his nervous razor had put in his chin this morning before the match. As he watched, the small man dried his palm on his white shorts. The gesture was all the more familiar because the small man's palm left a streak of red across the cloth. Hemp knew where the color had come from — from the red dye in the leather grip of his racket.

"You see," said the young woman, "you did not default after all."

Hemp glanced swiftly around the locker room. Except for himself, the room was deserted.

"You will win," she said.

Hemp didn't trust himself to speak. He sat there, backbone rigid, ready to bolt from the room.

She spoke again. "No, Robert, you are not mad. This is all quite reasonable."

Quickly, almost wildly, Hemp glanced around the locker room again. He was still alone.

"You will win." Her voice was low, a pleasing contralto. "But you *will* —" She paused. "You *will* win!"

Hemp rose from the bench and took a few steps past the lockers. He felt foolish. He started to speak, but broke off. Damned if he was going to be caught talking to four walls!

Without glancing back, he crossed the room and went out the door which led directly to the center court.

He looked for the other man, his double, whom he'd seen through the window — but the man was no longer there. Nor was the window.

No one seemed to have missed him, although the umpire frowned at him. On the opposite side of the net, Macmillan was preparing to serve and Hemp realized he was not in position to receive the ball. He moved up.

"Thirty, fifteen," said the loudspeaker.

Hemp looked at the umpire, waiting for the correction. The score was wrong, of course. He hadn't taken any points this game.

"Mr. Hemp, please don't delay." The umpire's tone was faintly annoyed.

It became plain then that there was to be no correction. Suddenly Hemp saw why. The third point had been played already — while he was in the locker room. His double had played it. I'm delirious, he thought. My brains have been fried by the sun!

The ball came crackling over, stabbing deep into the corner pocket. Hemp got there easily. He had all the time in the world. Time to see how the ball was

spinning, time to judge its angle of flight.

He stroked it. A perfect stroke, he could tell by the sensation in his arm and shoulder.

The racket shattered in his hand. Part of its curved head — broken strings sticking up like spears of hay, went skidding across the court. The ball plopped into the lap of a fat lady in the stands.

The umpire spoke gravely. "Forty, fifteen."

Hemp swore and he didn't care who heard. A rotten break! Point set!

A ball boy brought him a new racket. Angrily Hemp strode back to the base line.

Macmillan's next serve was a terrific cannonball, an obvious attempt to win the tournament with a final ace.

Hemp took it on the up-bounce and drove it straight down the line so deep, so hard and so accurately that Macmillan was caught flat-footed en route to the net and never touched it.

Again the service. Again Hemp drove it down the line — a backhand drive this time and fast as a rifle shot. In all his years of tennis, he'd never been able to bring off such a stroke. Macmillan knocked it wildly into the net.

"Deuce," said the loudspeaker quite respectfully.

Another smashing serve by Macmillan. This time Hemp crosscourted viciously. It eluded Macmillan, crashed into the corner of the wire fencing and rocketed back across the court. Finally, it rolled to a stop in front of a ball boy who picked it up and immediately dropped it. The boy put his fingers in his mouth, dismay on his face.

Another serve, another swift return and Hemp had broken Macmillan's service for the game.

The applause was a symphony in Hemp's ears. He felt lightheaded. Thoughts, strange thoughts about the young woman's voice and the window, tried to creep into his mind but he shut them out. Vitality raced through him and his blood pounded with elation. During the whole week of the tournament, no one else had broken Macmillan's big serve.

On his own serve, Hemp shattered another racket the first time he hit the ball. A little later during the game — which he won with four sensational aces — a ball bounded up to him from the net and he discovered why the ball boys had kept looking at him so strangely. The woolen cover was oven hot.

After that he let up a little, but not enough to make any difference in the score. His strokes were masterful things of terrific power and beauty. When he rushed the net, everything he laid his racket on went sizzling beyond Macmillan's reach.

He won the last set by an amazing love score and during the

whole short ten minutes of it the crowd was never silent.

The half hour after he was presented with the deep silver bowl was exactly as he'd always dreamed such a half hour should be. The handshakes, dozens of them, from veteran tennis greats, film actresses; the excited sports writers and their repeated question: "Man, where have you been keeping that game?" The autographs and the brief thrilling moments in front of the KNX microphone set up between the courts.

Even while he was taking his shower, they would not let him alone. He needed time, lots of it, to think about the things that had happened; but there was to be a big party at the Biltmore, and after the president of the tennis club himself offered the loan of a tuxedo, Hemp couldn't possibly refuse.

It was long after one A.M. before he let himself into his small bachelor apartment.

Almost as soon as the lock snicked shut behind him, he knew someone else was there.

Afraid to look around, afraid not to, he went out to the kitchenette and from there to the bath, bedroom and closets. He found no one.

He returned to the living room and slumped uneasily in the big, forest-green easy chair. He'd never felt so tired. The cramp which had bothered him all evening settled again in the muscle of his right calf. He rubbed it.

"You won."

Startled, he looked up.

A prickly sensation came and went across his shoulder blades. There was still no one else visible in the room — yet the young woman had spoken again, just as at the locker room. Only this time it was different. He hadn't exactly heard the words — rather, he'd sensed them.

"You won," she repeated. "And you must pay."

Hemp jumped to his feet, the cramp digging into his muscle like a claw.

"Naturally," said the young woman, "you are wondering who we are — you're not even certain yet if we actually exist."

Hemp did not reply.

"You remember your amazing strength of this afternoon — and do you notice that your cramp is gone?"

Hemp flushed. He rubbed the muscle, raised his leg and lowered it. The cramp was certainly gone. But cramps had gone away that easily before.

"Please step over to the window."

He didn't want to go. He didn't want to show that he was listening. But after a moment he went over to the wide living room window and glanced down at the dark street five stories below. A breeze stirred a tatter of newspaper snagged on a broken pipe extend-

ing upward from a blue neon grocery sign.

Across the street, the school building collapsed with a roar.

There were three one-story stucco structures with red tile roofs. Suddenly the one on the left crashed to the ground, boards and glass flying, great clouds of dust rising.

Although the apartment house was a good hundred yards from the building, the floor under Hemp's feet quivered. He stood stiffly before the window for a long time, until the dust was settling and the only sounds remaining were the comparatively quiet sounds of neighbors running to the scene.

Hemp turned away from the window. He felt sick. "All right, what do you want?"

"Good," said the voice. "We prefer to have your cooperation. But first let me assure you that the school was deserted. That is our one limitation — we cannot kill . . ."

It no longer was the voice of a young woman. Her contralto had been replaced by an elderly man's voice with the same general inflections, the same calm manner. Again the words were not spoken, but sensed. Hemp was not surprised at the change — he felt sure that nothing that happened from now on could surprise him.

"Some explanations are necessary," said the elderly man, "in order for you to understand what is required of you. These explanations will be brief. There are several billion of us living on this same planet and our citizens are approximately the same size as yours. However, entirely different laws of mass and energy apply to us. For example, Mr. Hemp, one of our citizens is now occupying for the moment the same space that you occupy as you stand by the window and he is no more aware of your presence than you are aware of his."

Hemp shivered. Crossing the room, he sat in his easy chair.

For thirty minutes or more, the explanations continued, Hemp following as well as he could. He wished he remembered more of his college physics and chemistry so the whole thing wouldn't seem so incomprehensible. According to the elderly man, his world was one of another dimension, an incredibly complex dimension. The equivalent of food for its citizens was products of certain radioactive materials. And for the lack of that food, their world was slowly dying.

"It is the fault of your people," the elderly man said gravely. "Ever since you detonated your first fission bomb and then those others, so many of them. Each time a bomb has been exploded, it has robbed us of more and more food, setting off chain reactions — invisible to your science — which have run the length and breadth of our world."

He explained that it was not

until recent years that the scientists of his dimension discovered the cause of the food loss. Then they found a method of breaking the barrier between the two dimensions. Soon afterward, their scientists found a new source of food energy. A source far superior to any radioactive material.

"It was necessary for us to wait," added the elderly voice, "until we could find exactly the right person, especially one with extra energy, a sports figure like yourself, Mr. Hemp. We had to wait until this afternoon when your brain was ready for us because of your physical exhaustion and your intense desire to win. It was not a matter of intelligence – the only determining factor was the huge energy capacity of your brain cells. So we made the contact, as you know. To lighten your surprise and amazement, we used a young woman's voice-thoughts at first, feeling they would be more soothing. Her voice-thoughts and mine, too, are purely mechanical impulses, merely a means of communicating with you through the barrier."

Placing his fingertips at his temples, Hemp massaged them. His head was beginning to ache, a strange pain, needle-like in its intensity.

"Pay no attention to the headache," said the elderly man. "It *will pass*. You will suffer no injury, you will be able to go about your daily routine in a perfectly normal manner. Your brain is exactly the right weight and at exactly the proper development to serve us as, shall we say, a catalyst. There may be another brain somewhere that would serve us as well – but it is doubtful that we could find it. Through your cells we will draw energy from the thousands of other sports figures of your world."

"Sports?" said Hemp. "Just athletes?"

"We need energy," said the elderly man. "Your sports people have more than the average. And because they have the same interests that you have, your brain contacts them readily."

Hemp continued to massage his temples. He was tired, extremely tired, and although he believed now that he actually was in contact with something rare and remarkable it failed to stimulate him.

"Will it . . . I mean the loss of energy. Will it hurt the athletes?"

"I will be frank," was the reply. "Their own physical energy will deteriorate."

Hemp stood up. "No! No!" he shouted. "You can't do that to those people! I won't agree to anything like that!"

"I'm sorry," said the elderly voice. "But you agreed when you replied that you would give anything to win your match this afternoon. We kept our part of the bargain – we gave you extra strength. In fact, that strength came from some of the athletes you now wish to protect."

"No!" shouted Hemp. "It's ridiculous! I won't do it! You can't make me do it!"

The elderly man's voice became cold. "Don't be a fool, Mr. Hemp. The process has already started. Why do you suppose your head aches? At this very moment we are drawing energy through your cells from hundreds of people. Any athlete who heard your voice on the radio this afternoon following your victory is now part of our link-up. . . ."

On a night three weeks later, Hemp sat at his kitchen table. He drank from a quart bottle of milk, draining half of it before setting the container down. On his plate was a heap of fried potatoes, bread soaked in gravy, a huge patty of hamburger and a helping of lima beans that slopped over onto the green checkered oil cloth. His fork moved rapidly stuffing food into his mouth.

Around him the floor was covered with torn and crumpled newspapers. The tile drainboards were piled high with dirty dishes.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the small mirror above the table. The picture was not pretty. His eyes were sunken and bloodshot and there was a heavy blond stubble on his gaunt, pale cheeks. A comb hadn't touched his hair for days and he was still wearing the borrowed tuxedo trousers and white shirt. The trousers were wrinkled and grimy; food stains colored the shirt front.

His eyes fell again on the headline of the newspaper lying near his elbow. *Doctors Probe Mass Disease Affecting Athletes.* With an angry sweep of his arm, he knocked the paper to the linoleum.

Finishing his plate, he slumped in his chair covering his face with his hands. Deep inside his skull his brain hummed with the pain that had been with him night and day during the past week.

He couldn't take it any longer. Not the pain — it wasn't that severe. Nor the fact that he was too weak to play tennis any longer, spending each day eating and sleeping, unable to do little more than feed his endless hunger.

What he couldn't stand any longer was the guilt.

He'd sold his brain to a devil far more insidious than Mephistopheles. Far worse than that, he'd sold all athletes to the same devil. The cream of America's stock and those of other countries as well. Hockey players, basketball stars, golfers, fullbacks, roller skaters, first basemen, soccer players — not a one was spared. Medical science was astounded by the evidence of so many young men and women eating ravenously, continuously — and still having subnormal energy.

He'd gone to the physicians and told them everything, hoping they could find some way to prevent what was happening. *They didn't* laugh at him. But in their quiet

way they'd made it plain that they considered him a crazy fool.

So there was only one thing to be done. He'd considered it carefully.

Hemp arose from the chair and took two steps from the table. His legs collapsed like damp straws. Arms windmilling, he tried to support himself with the table but it went over with a crash of shattered china. He lay unmoving in the mess, then raised slowly to his knees. But it was no good — as soon as he tried to straighten further he fell again.

He lay there longer this time, watching blood ooze where a shard of broken saucer had cut his arm. There was no strength anywhere in his body.

It came to him then suddenly why they had tapped this last bit of energy from him. They knew what he wanted to do.

They would do all they could to stop him. They would not let him destroy the brain that was their key.

Anger blazed through him. At least they haven't taken that from me, he thought bitterly. They'll let me be angry! The thought goaded him like a deep blade and he found himself able to edge along the linoleum on his belly. By the time he'd worked across the kitchen, the humming had increased to a screaming sound, as though within his skull a power saw had gone wild.

He dragged himself through the doorway into the living room, his fingernails digging into the rug. Drunkenly he raised his head for a glimpse of the window. It was so far away. Not just on the other side of the room; on the other side of the world.

He wanted to beg them to let him go, shriek at them till his throat was raw. He wanted to beat his fists in frustration against the floor. But all he could do was lie there and listen to himself slowly running down like an unwound watch.

After a long time, he tried again. He moved a few inches. A few more inches. He was amazed to see blood smearing his fingernails where they had broken as he dug them into the rug. Clutching the leg of the divan, he dragged himself further.

He found himself under the window. He couldn't believe it. He wondered how long ago he'd left the kitchen — an hour ago, yesterday, last week?

With a terrific effort, he raised to his knees. From the table he seized a heavy glass ashtray. He pounded it in short jerky strokes against the window. With maddening slowness, a web of cracks appeared. Finally the pane showered down around him.

Hooking his arms over the sill, he pulled himself up slowly, the bones of his back and shoulders protesting the strain.

He looked down at the sidewalk five stories below. The grocer's neon sign blinked bluely in the darkness and a black sedan drove

by, its tires whispering down the silent street. He waited until the car had disappeared.

"Stop!" said the elderly voice. "Don't be a fool! Don't throw away your life!"

Instantly Hemp thrust himself over the edge. Point set! he thought triumphantly.

He was surprised at how long it took him to start falling.

Then the brick wall at his elbow began to move more swiftly and he braced himself. He knew that if he were to be successful his head must strike first.

Abruptly the elderly man began to hiss. "You're a fool, Mr. Hemp. A fool! Alive, your brain was most useful to us. Dead, it will be priceless! Alive it controlled only athletes. Dead it will be released from the limitation of your interests. It will control everyone!"

"No!" shouted Hemp. "No! It will be smashed to bits!"

He was plummeting now, the wind shrilling past his ears.

The elderly man began to laugh. It was a high, humorless bird-like noise.

And Hemp saw that he was going to hit the neon sign that projected over the sidewalk. With the swiftness of a needle touching a nerve, he understood then what they had done. Because they could not kill, they had tricked him. They had deliberately allowed him enough strength to get out the window.

He tried to swing his arms to deflect himself from the sign, but now all his energy had disappeared.

Just before the long broken pipe pierced his heart, he knew he was going to hang there impaled.

The concrete on which he was lying was dark and warm and a white line ran under his cheek. After a moment, Hemp realized where he was and that the crowd was waiting for him to get up.

He rose unsteadily, surprised to see that he was still gripping his racket. Over at the net, Macmillan was waiting. Hemp nodded at him.

Macmillan served. The ball came crackling over, stabbing deep into the corner pocket. Hemp got there easily. He had all the time in the world.

He stroked the ball perfectly. But the racket shattered in his hand and the ball plopped into the lap of a fat lady in the stands.

They brought him a new racket.

Another smashing serve by Macmillan. This time Hemp cross-courted viciously. The ball shot powerfully past Macmillan, crashed into the wire fencing and rocketed back across the court.

With a feeling of horror, Hemp watched the ball roll to a stop in front of a ball boy who picked it up and immediately dropped it. The boy put his fingers in his mouth, dismay on his face.

THE DEVIL SPINS A SUN-DREAM

by JOHN JAKES

Case Barrows sat at a gloomy table in the corner, nursing his plastic tumbler of Terran whisky. Tall, lean, with a rawboned face and hard determined lips, he wore the faded yellowing trousers and shirt of that legion of the lost, the Martian sun-prospector. His steel gray eyes glowered somberly into the murky brown depths of the glass. Two fingers yet to go. His last coins had been spent for the drink. His pardner, Canalwater Moll, had deserted him two weeks before, run out in the middle of the celebration after they brought in two pokes of the glitter dust sold at two credits the ounce to the Terran Exchange Office down the street.

Glitter dust, impregnated in plastic furniture manufactured on Terra, was no substitute for the fabulous Martian sun-metal. Case thought bitterly that beyond this drink lay nothing, no money, no hope, no future. Even the thin vein of glitter dust had petered out. Why Canalwater had deserted him, he didn't know. He couldn't face Marcy now, either. . . His mouth twisted in savage bitterness.

The high-ceilinged interior, raftered in wood rocket-freighted all the way from Earth, lay shrouded in cool peaceful gloom. Beyond the tall windows, Case could see the small desert town: collection of iron-clay huts, a few stores, and the squat blue-windowed sides of the hydroponic spinach factory where Marcy worked tending trays. Down on all of it burned the inexorable sun, turning the thin air to eye-blinding sheeted brilliance. The bar had been designed for the town's Terran colony, the jet men on the mailrun and the factory workers.

But it remained alien, like the whole subjugated planet, because of the faint flattish odor emanating from the spindly bald blue-domed Martian who sat on a high stool and posed as a bartender, ridiculous white apron tied around his waist over his shorts. The Martian dozed, his head bent over so that it resembled an end view of a blue egg.

The whole damned planet's unfriendly, Case thought to himself. We can put up our cities and our factories and our flags, but we aren't built for another world. This belongs to the Martians. He tried to work the argument around to an excuse for his own failure to wrest treasure from the desert of Mars, and failed. Well, he thought, I can boomer it for a while. I can always sign on in the chalk pits, or the hydropon factory. *God!* He swirled liquor into his mouth. Marcy wanted him to give up his hunting, get a

cheap-paying job and live like the rest of the workers in the settlement of pre-fab barracks. No, sir, not Case Barrows. His dad had rotted his lungs away on the first Earth-Mars freight runs, dying with the green foul-smelling corrosion swelling his body. Case had seen enough of cheap living in his bitter boyhood to convince himself that he would find another way.

The last of the liquor went down his throat. *Finis.*

The bar door opened and Aka Hasp came in, emaciated, hollow-eyed, wearing faded tans and a sun helmet. Hasp greeted Case across the room, woke the bartender and secured a bottle. He walked toward Case, who decided to sit it out in return for a free drink. He did not trust Hasp, bastard spawn of some itinerant tubeman and a nameless, probably helpless Martian girl. Hasp's skin was an unhealthy blue-gray color, a mixture of pigments and bloods alien. Hasp had a reputation around the town for dishonesty. Case suspected that the corpse-like breed made his niggardly living from following the older prospectors and blasting their heads in when they struck any sort of pay claim at all.

"Have a drink, Case," Aka Hasp said, pulling out a chair with his boot.

"Thanks," Case said tonelessly, lifting his glass when Hasp had poured it full.

"Haven't seen Canalwater lately," Hasp said, leaning back and studying Case with a sardonic smile on his beard-stubbled lips.

"He hasn't been around."

"Still looking for the sun-metal city, eh?" Hasp asked.

Case drank slowly. "Isn't everybody?"

"An old Martian city built out of sun-metal, more valuable than gold, just sitting out there somewhere waiting for the first drunken desert bum to come along and clean it out," Hasp sneered. "There's no such animal."

"According to the historical records there is," Case countered.

"The records don't say where it is, though, do they, eh?" Hasp sat back again with a contented smile on his lips. "They don't say a thing."

"Maybe I'll find it some day, Aka, and prove you wrong."

Hasp snorted in high-pitched derision. Case's fingers tightened around the tumbler. He wanted to pulp that weird blue-gray face with his fists, see it dissolve into rubbery flesh and streaming ichor. The liquor in his glass, though, reminded him that Hasp had bought the drinks. He could not be choosey about his company, or complain about the conversation.

"What's on the fire now, Case?" Hasp asked, the devilish mockery deep in his slitted basilisk eyes.

"Nothing," Case blurted sharply. "I've got nothing but my equipment." It gave him brutal, savage pleasure to spit out words of self-condemnation.

"Why, that's too bad," Hasp said with forced sympathy. He finished his drink. "I've got a couple big glitter dust veins staked out. Ought to be good for another year's living. Maybe you can find the sun-metal city, though, Case. Eh?"

"Yeah," Case replied hollowly, knuckles white on his glass. "Maybe I can."

Hasp stood up. "Well, I got to be running. You keep the bottle, Case. I can spare a drink for a man who's down." With the final insult off his lips, he turned and strolled toward the door. Case came halfway out of his seat, then settled back again. What good would it do him to bash Hasp's head in? None. He poured himself another drink and watched Hasp retreat down the street, boots raising thick puffs of reddish dust. A mail rocket rose beyond the town, shaking the walls with jet thunder. Its fiery trail burned for a moment against the intense sky, and then was gone.

Case poured himself one more drink, downed it, gathered up his sun hat and started for the door. The Martian bartender dozed again. Case was two steps away from the door when it flew open. A man stood there, his clothes torn to ribbons, his cheeks matted with dirt, stubble and blood, his gray hair tangled and dirty. Case checked himself, startled. Canalwater Moll! The old man staggered forward and Case noticed the peculiar glaze to his eyes. Sunsick, he judged. The alien Martian desert got them one way or another.

Canalwater staggered forward. "Case! Case, boy. Gimme a drink. Gimme a drink for your old pal. I done right by you, boy. I done right!" The old man staggered, fell to one knee. Case lifted him and shut the door. The old man smelled of days in the sun as Case carried him to the table and lowered him into a chair. He poured a drink and raised it to Canalwater's lips. The old man gulped it, some of the liquor drooling unnoticed across his chin. The Martian bartender was awake now, watching with interest.

Case sat down across from his pardner. "Where have you been?"

"Eis . . ." The old man gulped for air. "Jesus, my head hurts. Eisenhower Peak, boy." A wild gleam came into the glazed eyes for a moment.

"Eisenhower!" Case exclaimed. "My God, that's nearly a hundred miles away. You came and went on foot?"

"Your... your goddamned right . I did," the old man gasped at ragged intervals. "Didn't want no one following me. The night I ran out on you, Case boy, I talked to an old Martian priest. He was comin' across the desert on a pilgrimage to the Red Sands shrine. He must of been two, mebbe three hundred years old. Lived way off in the mountains. I gave him some whisky when he asked for a drink and it made him kind

of sick, I guess. I . . . I asked him about the sun-metal city, like I ask all the Martians I meet. He told me where it was, and reason nobody ever found it is because it's sort of sunk underground. *Underground,* Case."

"You . . . you found the sun-metal city?" Case asked in a whisper.

"Yeah, Case boy." The old man blinked, his brow knotting in pain. "God, I had too much sun. Lost my hat on the Peak. Walked all the way back without it." Saliva drooled from one corner of his mouth and he reached feebly for the drink. Case raised it to his lips for him and he drank loudly. "I run out on you, Case boy, because I figured if this was too tough a job for a youngster like you, why it wouldn't hurt none if I got killed in a false alarm. Silly." He shook his head from side to side with measured slowness. "I ain't been worth much this last year, Case. I wanted to show you I could find something and I did. Here." He pulled a folded piece of paper from his shirt pocket and handed it to Case. "The map."

Case unfolded the paper with trembling hands, looked at it. The sun-metal city buried in Eisenhower Peak! Case's eyes narrowed. This was it, this could be the bonanza he had waited for all his years. Enough to take him out of the dried-up little desert towns, enough to take him, and Marcy, to the cities of Mars, and back to Earth.

"Listen, Canalwater," Case said softly. "We'll get you to a doc and. . . ."

The old man's head had drooped onto his chest. He seemed asleep. Case shook him, repeated his name again. Then Canalwater threw back his head and screamed hideously. His eyes glazed completely. His limbs began to twitch. Case cursed, standing by as the old man fell out of the chair, writhing across the floor. Froth poured out over the old man's lips. Another piercing, horrendous scream, and the old man jerked spasmodically for the final time. Case, bitter-eyed, noticed that the bartender had walked up. He stood shaking his eggish blue head.

"Sun-sick. They all die this way."

Case bent down and raised the old man's body into a chair. The bearded, filthy face wore a mask of almost childlike peace now. Case stood back, and he felt the paper of the map in his hand, burning there. Canalwater had spent his last effort getting back here, to give him the secret of the sun-metal city. Case's hand constricted on the map. Then he put it in his shirt pocket and buttoned the flap.

"Come on," he said to the bartender. "Help me take him to the Exchange Office. They'll freight his body home, if he's got a home on record . . ."

Six hours later, near the end of

the day, Case stood outside the factory gate. He wore heavier boots now, and his pack was strapped across his shoulders, along with a huge-barreled magnesium rifle. The sun hat slanted low over his eyes. The factory bell shrilled and the doors opened, pouring out a flood of men and women, Terrans and Martians. Case caught Marcy's eye and she came to him, small-boned and pretty in her smock, her yellow hair caught up behind her neck in a silk scarf. Sorrow showed in her eyes the minute she saw his equipment.

"Case . . ." She touched his arm. "You're going out."

Case nodded tightly. He drew her to the side. "Don't tell anyone where I've gone Marcy, but this is it. The big one. The sun-metal city."

Marcy's eyes mirrored fear. "Oh, no, Case."

"Canalwater came back today. He found it."

"Canalwater! Where is he?"

Case hesitated. "Dead. He got sun-sick."

"Case, please don't . there's nothing but evil out in that desert."

"There's a fortune for both of us!" Case answered sharply. "And I'm going to find it, get us enough money to leave this town."

"We could be happy here, Case," she pleaded. "The factory would give you a good job, and . . ."

"Don't start that again, damn it," Case snapped. "Even if I didn't want to go, I still owe a debt to Canalwater. Understand that." His eyes softend and he bent forward and kissed her lightly. "Please."

She nodded, her eyes downcast. "Yes, Case. Only . . I'm afraid."

"Don't be. I'll be back in a week or two."

After another brief kiss, Case watched her leave, joining into the flow of workers, disappearing down the streets of the town and raising a cloud of dust through which the dying sun shone like a flat red-gold disk. Adjusting his pack, Case tramped toward the edge of town, deliberately away from the direction of Eisenhower Peak. He walked toward the sun, watching the town sink behind him as his boots slogged through the heavy red sand. He began to sweat, and soon it felt like his whole skin boiled. He took the dial from his pocket and turned on the cooling system built into his shirt and trousers. He kept his eyes on the ground ahead of him, and when the sun first dropped behind the distant range, he doubled back in a wide angle. Far far in the distance he could see a v of darkness against the darkening Martian sky. The Eisenhower Peak. He tramped on with bitter determination.

He slept in the shadow of a rock outcropping, and awoke with a gritty-hard sand feel on his skin, just after daybreak. He was sweating already. As he opened food

packets and downed the tablets one after another, he heard the sound of a magnesium rifle exploding, somewhere behind him. The thunderous noise accompanied by the rushing of air could not be mistaken.

His stomach crawling with tight fear, Case closed his pack and climbed to the top of the outcropping. Slipping on goggles that shielded his eyes from dangerous sun rays, he surveyed the path he had taken the night before. He saw no signs of movement or life.

Hastily Case clambered down and started toward the Eisenhower Peak. The shot could mean only one thing. His whole nervous system sang with an awareness of it. No one shot game in the desert, since no game lived there. A quarrel between prospectors? Unlikely. Case forced his legs to whip faster and faster as he tramped through the sand. *Someone was behind him. Someone had followed him. Someone wanted the sun-metal city for themselves.*

Case unlimbered his own magnesium rifle, and in spite of the added weight he carried it at the ready. One step, another, another. The v of mountain rose fraction of an inch by fraction of an inch from the horizon. Case whirled at regular intervals, but behind him lay only red desert, nothing else. His pursuer kept well hidden.

By noon Case had almost convinced himself that no one was following him. The sun burned his skin and the cooling system did little to relieve the coating of sweat. His eyes boiled within the goggles. He had eighty, ninety miles yet to go. He stopped for his noon meal.

Crouching on his haunches, he unwrapped the food capsule. The explosion of the magnesium rifle sounded loud in the desert silence. The capsule dropped out of Clay's hands, and a puff of wind covered it with sand. Clay got jerkily to his feet, and then resolution tightened his mouth. He raised his own magnesium rifle and sent two white fireballs blasting at the sky. The reports rolled across the desert. From behind him came an answering two charges.

Case shouldered the rifle and started on. Now it was a game, and more than a game; war, life and death. They were each aware of the other, and Case resolved with quiet determination to kill his follower. Not yet. No need for that. He had plenty of time, because the follower would want to be led to the sun-metal city. Case slogged on through the red sand, his face set in satanic lines, flushed by the sun. Case had all but forgotten about his dead pardner. *I'm going greed-crazy,* he thought as he marched. He laughed flatly, a dry chuckle. He didn't care now. All he wanted was the sun-metal, and he would kill to get it . . .

Case kept on across the desert, day after sun-blistering day, until the craggy splendor of the Peak loomed close above him. Due to the slightly rolling quality of the

desert he had been unable to see his pursuer, but some sixth sense, born of the development of perceptions through long years spent on the hot silent sands told him that the stalker was never far behind. As Case climbed through the slaty blue shale at the base of the Peak on the sixth day, he decided that he was close enough to the sun-metal to put up a fight for it. His back itched with sweat and the heat had drained him of much energy, but thanks to his clothing, his helmet and goggles, the worst effects of the sun had been staved off.

He spotted a boulder farther up the slope which would make a good vantage point. From there he could look downward and outward and surely catch sight of the stalker who followed him. Case renewed his step with greater quickness and slid into place a moment later behind the boulder. He dumped his pack on the ground and slid the barrel of his magnesium rifle out along the blue rock. His eyes narrowed. He saw nothing moving on the slope, nor out on the desert. His eyes combed the landscape for natural pockets where the stalker might hide, but he saw none that were not at least partly visible. For some ten minutes he lay, the Martian sun broiling his back, and then he heard the mirthless laugh behind him.

He whirled awkwardly, rolling onto his back. His eyes identified the goggled figure of Aka Hasp as he tried to jerk the rifle around. Hasp laughed loudly and the barrel of the breed's magnesium rifle loomed large and round like the eye of death. The fireball exploded from the weapon, spiraling toward Case, who clawed desperately at the earth to get out of the way. The blaze of whitish fire struck his side, and the searing pain drove him into unconsciousness, filled with the sick knowledge of defeat.

He awoke to feel sweat coursing down his naked chest. He sat in cool shadows higher on the face of the mountain under a rock ledge. The wound in his side showed a fresh white plastic Healing Plaster. Hasp, squatting in front of him like a grotesque green-goggled bird, raised a canteen to Case's lips, and he drank. Case sighed loudly. Quiet determination burned within him now, and hatred. He watched Hasp, seeing that the map lay spread out before the breed. Case's chance would come. Right now, with the leaden pain in his side, he would be foolish to move.

"How did you find out?" Case asked through hot cracked lips.

Hasp chuckled. "Mixed blood can be an advantage, Barrows. The bartender being a Martian has Martian leanings. He overheard what Canalwater said to you before he died." Hasp shook his head. "You were foolish, talking about the sun-metal city before anyone. But then, seeing Canalwater for the first time, I can

understand how you could forget to be cautious." A thin sneer etched itself upon the gray-blue lips. "Tough luck, Barrows. The city and the sun-metal are mine. I promised the bartender an eighth." Hasp laughed again, and his tone made it clear that the bartender would only get a rifle blast in the back for his trouble when the time came.

Hasp laid a finger on a map. "Here's a rock wall that's got to be blasted. I've already set the charge. Last night."

"Last night?" Case exclaimed. "Have I been out that long?"

Hasp nodded. "I figured you'd lay a trap for me when we got to the Peak, so I double-timed ahead of you. Once I blast that wall, Barrows, I'll be in the Martian city. I'm going to let you look at it once before you die, to see how you missed being a king. Like that?"

Case spat loudly on the ground, contemptuously. Hasp scrambled to his feet, and tore off his goggles. His eyes burned. "You bastard!" he screamed. "You high-toned pure-blooded Earthman. This is Mars and I'm a Martian and I've got more right to the sun-metal than any of you Earthmen ever had."

His hands criss-crossed Case's cheeks, slapping hard. Case tried to rise, and Hasp seized his elbow, pulling him roughly to his feet. Hasp stepped back and covered him with his rifle. "Walk ahead of me, Barrows. I think I'll finish this as quick as I can." He breathed heavily, controlling himself with effort. Case started up the slope, feeling the hot sun sear his naked back as he stepped into its glare. A hot wind lifted red dust. They tramped for perhaps a thousand feet, then started down a narrow defile whose end was blocked by a rising wall of bluish stone.

"Stop there," Hasp said when they were half way down the defile. Case halted and Hasp stepped quickly forward. He thrust home the plunger of the small black box with his boot and Case instinctively turned his face away. The wall erupted in a soft thunder of smoke and falling rock. Case pressed himself to the face of the defile, feeling bits of stone rain sharply on his back. When the noise died and the dust cleared, he turned toward the end of the defile.

Case caught his breath. Upward beyond the end of the defile thrust a spidery tower of the brilliant sheened sun-metal. A tower of the city! Case turned to look at Hasp. A change had come over the Martian. His face went slack with lust, and he dropped his rifle from slack hands. Almost as if he moved like a creature without mind, Hasp stumbled past Case and ran toward the end of the defile. "The city!" Hasp shouted. "The sun-metal city!" His voice bounced back and forth crazily between the rock walls.

Case followed him with pain-

filled steps. Hasp disappeared over the lip of the defile path and by the time Case reached the edge, Hasp was half-way down the slope. Case braced himself against the rock wall, breathing hard, his mind staggered by the unbelievable beauty below him. Seven delicate spidery buildings, tall and graceful as upreaching female hands, were arranged around a central court. Streets radiated outward from the court. The buildings gleamed with the burnished ageless luster of the marvelous Martian sun-metal. Hardly more than a village in terms of number of buildings, Case nevertheless saw the buildings as comprising a city fit only for the ancient regal kings of this dusty red planet. Hasp ran like a mad thing toward the central plaza, gibbering insane greedy sounds that echoed dismally in the gloom where sunlight failed to penetrate. Case realized that his chance was now if he wanted to escape, but something held him to the rim of the slope, watching the breed caressing the walls of the buildings as he ran.

Hasp reached the central plaza and the first syllables of the voice sounded. Hasp stopped, raising an imploring insect face to a patch of sky. The voice, ancient and eternal, came from the sky and the buildings and from nowhere at all.

"Earthman," the voice intoned, *"you who have desecrated this royal city, you shall never profane nor desecrate further these hallowed Martian towers."* The voice died away. Hasp began to run helplessly in a circle in the plaza. Far below, Case heard his voice crying out.

"I'm no Earthman!" Hasp was screaming. "I'm a Martian, a Martian like you, do you hear, a Martian?"

Hasp did not see the thing that rolled down from the darkness behind the city, but Case saw, his mouth sagging open in horror. A black globular shadow, wet and undulating that filled the street from wall to wall, one baleful red eye glaring in its turbulent center. High as he stood, Case caught a rotting stench. The thing crept like a living river, and Case could see other black pseudopods encircling the whole small city. then coursing inward along each of the streets. Hasp ran frantically like a trapped insect, screaming his half-breed lungs out. Silently the black shapelessness moved, until Hasp disappeared in the center and only the baleful red eye gleamed in the semi-darkness below the lustrous towers.

A trap, Case thought. *A last ancient trap of the Martian kings, to keep out the infidels . . .*

From high on the peak came a muffled explosion. Case glanced up and drew back instinctively as he saw the tons of rock cascading down from the heights, ripped loose by some invisible explosive planted eons before. Blindly Case turned and began to run back up the defile as the thunder grew in

his ears. Past the detonation box, down to the cool shaded place under the ledge. With wild panic filling him, Case had foresight enough to snatch up hat and goggles, though he couldn't find his shirt. He ran on down the slope, falling, scraping his legs until they bled, rending his trousers, while behind him came the awful awesome roar of the death of the last vestiges of ancient Martian civilization.

Case was a mile from the base of the mountain before he dared turn. His awe-struck eyes saw the whole top of the Peak collapse inward and downward, burying the ancient city under thousands of tons of rock, burying the infidel who was supposed to have been an Earthman. The sun drove slivers of heat into Case's eyes as he thought of the old priest who had first told Canalwater of the location of the city. How old had he been? Two hundred? Three hundred? An infant, too young to remember the trap laid for the invaders centuries before. The whole Peak top boiled with smoke like a fireless volcano.

Case turned away, feeling the sun on his shoulders in new agonies of heat. His wound began to itch. He slogged forward on the first of the hundred miles back to the town, the treasure forgotten, uncared for now. The miles fell one by one under his feet and the days and nights blended into a delirium of fever. He imagined himself dying like Canalwater, but the hat and the goggles kept his brain from frying completely. His skin broiled, blistered, peeled, broiled and repeated the whole process several times a day. Vague madman shapes began to dance on the desert before him. Years passed and he knew that his mind was losing control. The heat sizzled behind his eyeballs, tormented him with white-hot knives in his side. Whole periods of time passed from his mind. He crawled, he ran, he stumbled, on and on, mile after sandy red mile.

He remembered seeing the windows of the hydroponic factory glistening like blue headstones in the distance. Then sun-blinding oblivion. Then he remembered standing in the door of the bar, his eyes peering into the cool empty shadows, picking out the startled agonized face of the Martian bartender. Then he remembered nothing, only knew that somehow he had made the long journey back to life only to feel himself drawn downward into hot black death.

Three weeks later Case Barrows sat in the bar one evening with a number of other miners and prospectors. It was his first day out of the Terran hospital, where burn surgery and skin grafts had finally restored his body. A new fat Martian tended bar. The other one, Case learned, had killed himself the day Case arrived in town.

The prospectors pumped Case unmercifully for information.

"What'd ye find out there, Case? A strike?"

"Nothing," Case replied softly, drinking his whisky.

"The sun-metal city, Case?"

"Nothing but the devil, Charlie. The devil making a lot of crazy dreams. Spinning them like a web."

"What kind of talk is that?" A derisive snort went around the table.

"See Hasp out there, Case? He left about the same time you did."

"I saw no one."

"Except the devil," mockingly.

"Except the devil," Case agreed. He slammed his glass down. "I'm through with this desert. We don't belong here, none of us do. We're ripping the guts out of something that doesn't belong to us."

"Gonna get a nice ordinary job and get married and settle down, are you, Case?" another of the prospectors jeered.

"Yeah," Case said quietly. "That's exactly what I'm going to do."

The jeering prospector shut up. The others looked first at Case, then around the table. They had seen hell in Case Barrows' eyes. "Aw, Case," one them said, "you can't quit grubbing. The desert's got all of us."

"It hasn't got me," Case replied, a semblance of good humor returning now. But beneath his words lay dead seriousness. "I'm getting as far away from this town and the Martian desert as I can. Tonight's Marcy's last at the factory. She's collecting her pay and we're taking the midnight mail rocket out. So I'll be saying goodbye to all of you, and wishing you had sense enough to quit, too."

"Crazy talk," one complained.

"Maybe so," Case replied, standing up. He stared around the table. The room was deathly still. "Maybe sometimes it's better to be crazy."

The door opened. Case turned, and a smile of tired relief crossed his mouth. In the door stood Marcy, waiting, her face shining with hope and eagerness. Case picked up his hat and walked toward her, drowning himself in the healing depths of her eyes.

KING BEE

by WINSTON K. MARKS

On a lovely June morning in Washington, D. C., Don Coster Sharples, Secretary of State, received the ultimatum from the bees.

Sharples had just shared scrambled eggs and grapefruit with the President and two other cabinet members at the White House and was strolling along in the bright sunshine to benefit his digestions, both mental and gastronomical.

The tall, scholarly figure in morning clothes paced his gait to the precise needs and limitations of his muscles and wind. These twelve-hour days with their 24-hour burdens were exhausting to his 67-year old, fragile body; but a morning walk in the sun always helped begin the day relaxed physically, if not mentally.

He moved, as usual, deeply in thought. The problem of the forthcoming United Nations atomic power conference dominated his reflections, as he neared the little park. He was oblivious to the sweet blossoms, the newly-leafed trees, the bees raping the clover and the statue-defiling pigeons that fluttered dangerously near his silk hat. In fact, the king bee had to buzz him three times before he took note that he was being accosted.

He stopped stock still, removed his pince-nez and squinted his eyes. The act broke his concentration, so the tiny voice finally penetrated his massive brain and registered: "Mister Secretary, I gotta talk to you."

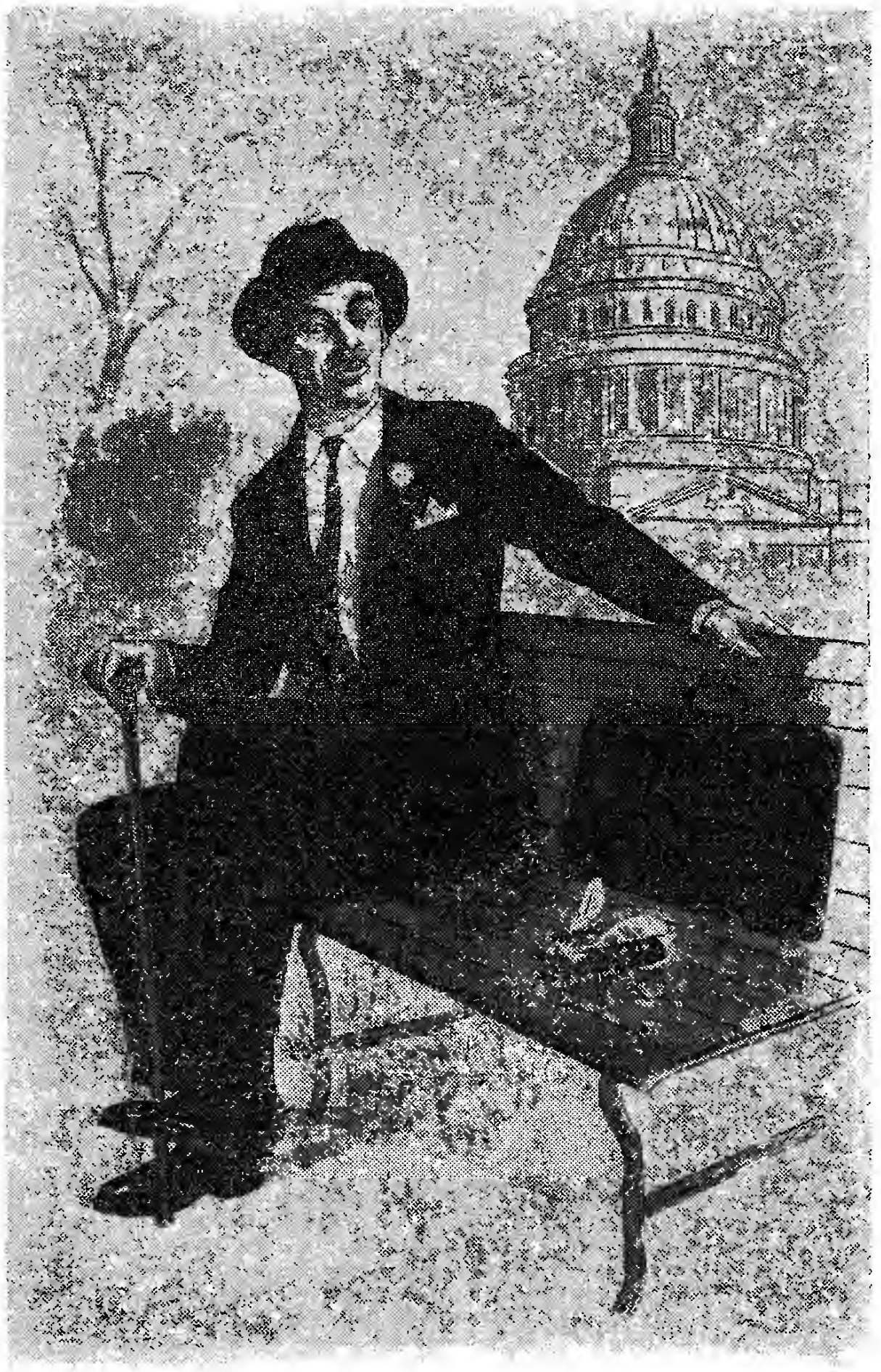
Sharples blinked, replaced his glasses and was confronted with a bumble-bee the size of a tea-cup hovering not fifteen inches from his pointed nose.

"Indeed?" Sharples uttered before he thought.

"Indeed!" the bee replied, dipping and floundering clumsily to regain altitude. The drone of his over-sized wings was deep and erratic, like a pair of badly-tuned bomber engines. Even normal-sized bees are aerodynamic monstrosities, and this giant was having trouble remaining airborne at all.

Yet he moved with such purpose, and the piping little thought waves he emanated were so pervasively sincere that Sharples was allowed no moment of doubt. Here was a bumble-bee with something on his mind. The astounding thing was the telepathic method of communicating. The word-thoughts impinged on the auditory nerve as clearly as though softly spoken with the voice of a peanut-vender's whistle.

"Over here, if you don't mind," the bee said and led the way to a bench beneath an elm tree.



Entranced, Sharples followed, seated himself gingerly, rested his briefcase in his lap and watched the insect negotiate a precarious landing beside him in the splotch of sunlight at the far end of the bench.

"There, that's better," the bee telepathed. "I'm pretty rotten at this flying around. Can't think and fly at the same time." His legs quiveringly supported his fat body until he bellied down on the warm wood. Sprawled there, quite unbee-like, he was vulnerable to Sharples' closer inspection. Handsomely marked with an encircling golden band, it was obvious this was no ordinary bee. His front, instead of tapering to a point, bulged with intelligent forehead and widely spaced, compound eyes. Also, his antennae were extra-long and mobile with surprising cross-hairs much like a yagi array.

Sharples removed his silk hat and placed it carefully on the grass. He was a man of tremendous pragmatism. His worth to the administration lay in his extensional habits of thinking, and his cool head under pressure. That a bee should address him, telepathically or otherwise, was a phenomenon of intense interest to Sharples, but hardly debatable. His own senses reported the event, and the Secretary of State had long learned that evidence of his senses was preferable to intentional inquiry.

Quite naturally a number of questions rushed to his mind, but out of habit, Sharples opened the conversation diplomatically. "You are the largest, handsomest bee I have ever seen, and certainly the most articulate."

"Thanks, Sharpy," the bee acknowledged. "You talk good, too. Fact is, way we got it figured, you are key man in govmint. Right?"

Modesty forbade Sharples from admission to such a broad assertion, so he parried, "If you have a message for the government of the United States, you have confronted the proper office."

"I sure do have message. Got news for you. Bees all fed up with nuclear horsing around. Gonna get countryside blowed to hell and louse up pollen collection if not careful."

A faint cloud of concern for his sanity touched Sharples' mind, but he clung grimly to the report of his senses. So a bee was worried over the atomic situation? Why not? Everyone else was!

"I presume you refer to the A-bomb tests out west?" he asked politely.

"Naw! Don't bother much. You people got to experiment, we understand all right. I'm talking about international situation," the bee said. "If it wasn't gettin' out of hand, we'd never stick noses in your business."

Sharples polished his fragile pince-nez to give his nervous hands something to do. "And what are your views on the international situation?"

"As we see it," the bee said, "human race is on verge of wonnaful era. Figured out atomic power and stuff like that. Pretty soon have it pretty soft. Only one thing's wrong. Each country's hoggin' secrets from others and makin' bombs instead a power plants."

"So you anticipate war?"

"It's a cinch, way things're goin'. Whole damn globe's gonna catch it one a these days, and bees ain't about to hold still for it."

In spite of the rough language, Sharples noted a certain regal tone in the bee's silent, mind-penetrating voice. It occurred to him that this wasn't just any bee. Tactfully he asked, "I take it you are a special representative of your species?"

"I'm king bee."

"King bee? Hmm. I thought I knew a bit about entymology," Sharples mused aloud. "Queen bees, yes, but ——"

"Potful you don't know about bees, mister," the king bee told him adjusting his antennae for maximum directional effect. "I see questions in yer mind. Guess I oughta explain.

"I'm just overgrown drone, fed up special for job of contacting humans."

"But I thought male bees were ——" Sharples stopped in embarrassment, but his thought got through.

"—— lazy, worthless creatures," the bee finished for him. "Not on your life! Who d'ya think does all thinkin' for nest? Women? Nuts! Workers don't know nothin' but honey and pollen, and Queenie, she's got her work cut out.

"Males are thinkers and recorders. We pump brains of workers and file observations in race-memory bank so's to pass on to next generation."

"But a king bee —— we have never been able to distinguish an outstanding *male*——" Sharples interrupted.

"Wouldn't be able to. I'm king because I got best mind in nest. Don't show, and get this straight: I ain't braggin' about how smart bees is. You humans got it all over us on brains. We're proud of you, and don't mind you bein' boss of show up to now. But we think yer makin' big mistake on this atom thing."

"There are many who will agree with you," Sharples told him, "but they never come forward with any sensible alternatives."

"That," the bee announced, "is why I am here. Answer's plain as anything when you think about it. All you gotta do is turn all secrets loose all over world. Atomic energy means cheap power, means food for everybody. When everybody's got full belly, no more war."

Sharples smiled thinly. He might have expected a colony of bees to hold such a communistic concept. There were plenty of human counterparts to this bee

thinking, and he wished sometimes they had his job of facing the infinite complexity of the problem.

"Could never sell that to Congress," he said sadly. "The arms race is regrettable, but I'm afraid it's inevitable."

"Looky, Sharples," the bee heaved to his feet and waddled a couple inches closer, "bees ain't interested in politics, but this is serious matter. You didn't tumble when I said we ain't about to stand for this."

The Secretary tensed nervously at the motion and noted how the little dagger of a stinger pulsated at the south end of his fuzzy companion. "What —— what do you propose?"

"We ain't proposin' —— we're layin' down the law. Instruct U.N. delegates to go to conference tomorrow and get ball rollin' on disarmament and takin' wraps offa atomic secrets *or else*."

Sharples was not entirely without sympathy for the simple-minded attitude, but he was not accustomed to threats, nor was he intimidated. "Mankind and bees have always lived in peace," he said firmly, "and it would be most unfortunate if you got any ideas ——"

For answer the king bee reared up high on his forelegs, twiddled his antennae like a radar reflector, and to Sharples' discomfiture bees, alone, in pairs and in platoons began arriving instantly. They were ordinary workers of several varieties, but like the king bee, they arrived purposefully and with a menacing hum of hovering wings.

The swarm formed an envelope about the bench, roughly spherical in shape and about ten feet in diameter. The thought of attempting to run the gauntlet of their stings was chilling.

The king bee leveled off at him again. "Do you have any notion just how many bees in world?"

"I'm —— I'm afraid I don't."

"Well, to give you idea, this little mob just from one cherry tree over there. Not hive, just one work party. Whadda ya think you'd look like if I gave the word?"

Before he could answer or even wipe the perspiration from his brow, the sound of leather heels clicked along the sidewalk, and the king bee dismissed the workers with a flick of his head. With infinite relief Sharples saw the pedestrian was Bernie Brook, his good friend, the elder statesman, who frequented this park and its benches daily.

The king bee shot out his warning quickly, "Meeting of the General Assembly is tomorrow noon. I'll expect you back here tomorrow morning with right answer, or Assembly will not meet."

With that, the hefty insect spread his wings, sagged between them and floundered off into the foliage of the trees.

Brook spotted the Secretary, and his face rearranged its deep

wrinkles into a pleasant smile. He was a large man, square of shoulder, hatless and white-haired. "Well, Don," he greeted, "it's surprising to find *you* communing with nature."

"Good morning, Bernie. You're looking well."

The 80-year old eyes were blue and clear in the square face. "Don't know as I can say the same for you," he frowned and sat on the patch of sunlight just vacated by the king bee. "You look a little peaked."

Sharples retrieved his top hat from the grass and studied the white lining. "I don't wonder. Your beloved *nature* is a bit astonishing at times. As you came up I was engaged in conversation with a bumble-bee with distressingly communistic ideas."

"On a special mission for McCarthy?" Brook chuckled. Hadn't heard he was investigating the apiaries."

Instantly Sharples realized how foolish he would sound if he tried to reveal the details of his communion with the king bee. Already the reality of the miscegenated conversation was fading. He sighed wearily. Senility crept up on a man, he supposed. Tomorrow the pigeons would probably come up with a suggestion on the FEPC or the Point-Four Program.

The following morning was solid with appointments, and his daily walk was impossible. As he left the State Department offices for lunch an aide thrust a scrap of teletype into his hand. He read it on the elevator:

PLAGUE OF BEES INFESTS GREATER NEW YORK AREA. TRAFFIC SNARLED. ACCIDENTS MOUNT ON PANICKED HIGHWAYS. MEETING OF U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY POSTPONED FOR LACK OF QUORUM.

Sharples entered his limousine in a daze. Before the door closed a bumble-bee the size of a teacup buzzed in with him and tumbled to a disgraceful landing on the cushion beside him.

"What's big idea ignoring our ultimatum?"

The huge, black vehicle was divided by a soundproof, glass partition. Sharples moved to a corner where his face was not visible to the chauffeur in the rear view mirror. "My dear bee," he said selfconsciously, "I told you I couldn't sell such a proposition to my government."

"You didn't try! Never even made our demands public. Case you ain't heard, we got U.N. Building staked out, and they not about to meet."

"*You're* responsible for that?"

"Natch! Told you what would happen, and that's just drop in bucket. If you don't play ball gonna be general strike."

Sharples slipped a trembling hand to his hat, gripped it firmly by the brim and with one desperate motion clapped it over the king bee, trapping him in the crown. Then he picked up the

speaking tube and gave his driver a brief instruction.

The limousine stopped at a store, and the bewildered chauffeur returned with a quart Mason jar with screw-type lid. Sharples told him to drive to the hotel, and when he was back in the driver's seat, quickly transferred the ominously silent king bee to the jar.

At his suite he dismissed his valet and placed the jar on his desk. He loosened the cap so air could get in and studied the gold-banded creature inside. The king bee was quivering with rage, his dark body pulsating heavily and his stinger curled under him like a poised dagger. The antennae swiveled to follow Sharples as he moved around the jar looking in.

The Secretary of State chose his words cautiously. "It appears we have underestimated each other," he said.

"Only half right," the bee retorted. "What in hell do you think you've accomplished, sticking me in bottle?"

"You are my hostage—the hostage of the United States," Sharples corrected himself. "Now, call off your boycott of the U.N. or —— or suffer the consequences!"

The bee rotated on his vertical axis, faced the window and steadied his antennae. Involuntarily, Sharples glanced at the great window. A small cloud of bees swarmed like spots before his eyes. In a moment they scattered like buckshot.

"Strike is on," the king bee announced. "You'll be sorry!"

For a moment Sharples knew a feeling of terror, then he reasoned with himself. Even if this bloated creature had the power to call such a strike he wouldn't do it on such slight provocation. When a bee stings, unlike most other stinging creatures, it is not only disarmed but vitally injured itself. Certainly, this leader bee wouldn't declare war when every wound imposed would cost the life of a warrior.

"Quite right, Sharpy. Orders do not include stinging anybody. Oh, there'll be few million casualties, because local kings can't control all hot-heads. This is just nuisance raid. Inside hour, word will be passed coast to coast, and won't be a human on streets in whole country. Look what we did in New York just by buzzing people's faces."

"But my people won't know that," Sharples said. "They'll fight back. There'll be planes up with insecticides, and they'll use blow-torches and flame-throwers. They'll burn out your hives and destroy your ——"

"They'd better think twice," the king bee reminded him. "What happens to bee-pollinated crops if bees wiped out, not to mention honey industry?"

The implication struck Sharples hard, for the king bee was right. The Department of Agriculture was in a serious spot. He tried to visualize an America barren of

fruit and berries and even flowers.

"You get picture real good," the bee informed him. "Now let me out of stuffy bottle before I give the word to turn loose hornets and wasps. If we get *them* worked up your goose cooked, fellow."

He was licked, and he knew it. He unscrewed the lid and laid the jar on its side. The king bee waddled out on his desk-blotter and pulsed for the space of ten quick breaths. Sharples sank back in his leather chair in deep depression. A fine statesman he was! Couldn't even dicker with an insect!

"Now, get on phone. Contact U.N. Delegates," the bee demanded.

Sharples shook his head. "You don't understand. I don't have that power. What you demand would have to clear the Senate and House Armed Forces Committees. The administration couldn't pull off a policy change like that without months of parleys and a genuine show of good faith by the heads of the other major governments."

His mind touched gloomily on the whole impossible snarl of international relations, the suspicions, fears and mountains of misunderstandings that existed between nations.

The king bee was silent as he studied what he found in Sharples' mind. At length his antennae drooped and he said, "God-amighty, guess you're right! Didn't figure on being that complicated."

"You have no idea ——"

"I'm gettin' it. You paint pretty hopeless picture."

"Then call off this strike," Sharples urged. "Quickly, before any damage is done!"

"Not so fast! Thinking." After a long pause the king bee said, "Looks like your government agrees with our ideas, but don't know how to put across to other countries. Right?"

"Of course," Sharples admitted. "We want nothing more than assurances of world peace, and we know that if we could trust the others to ——"

"Okay, bub, I call off strike —— for now. But here's what you got to do."

The infestation of bees disappeared, and the U.N. General Assembly met in one, summer-long, wrangling session. They picked at the nut of disarmament and free dissemination of atomic power information, but the shell refused to crack. As the tension increased, vetoes and recriminations were the headlines of the day.

In a way it made Don Coster Sharples' impossible job easier. By early September he had accomplished the king bee's bidding and arranged a Big-Five secret conference in Washington D.C.

On a crisp, autumn morning, several limousines converged on a grimly gray, concrete building in Washington, each disgorged a single occupant and pulled up to

park and wait patiently on the leaf-cluttered avenue.

Secret service men of five nationalities surrounded the block, loitering casually, smoking cigarettes and watching each other from the corners of their eyes.

Inside, five men took their places around the round, walnut table, and a sixth came in late carrying a brief-case.

Sharples unzipped the case gently, extracted nothing from it, but placed it on the floor behind his chair. Then he, too, was seated. He glanced around the table. Beside the President of the United States, there were Winrock Temple, Paul Shofvoff, Conway Colgne and Foo Ting.

The Russian and Chinese premiers had objected the most to Sharples' request that they meet privately without interpreters, but even they knew enough English to get along.

Sharples' most important triumph had been to get himself included in the ultra-secret conference. He had done so by sheer force of personality and by promising to present a brand new procedure never before revealed to humankind.

All five men were staring at him hardfaced now, and he knew that his career, if not international peace, hung on the fatuous faith he had been forced to place in the king bee.

"Well, Don?" the President said.

"In just a moment," Sharples began, swallowing dryly, "we shall all be joined in a telepathic conference circuit. Don't be startled, gentlemen ——" he said holding up his hand. "I have personally experienced this type of communication, and I can assure you it is possible."

At that moment six large bumble-bees were, he knew, slipping from his brief-case. According to the king bee, each would station herself —— they were queen bees —— behind one of the chairs. Just how the telepathic linkage would be managed was beyond Sharples' understanding, but the king bee had assured him it would be unanimous and effective.

Winrock Temple puffed his jowels. "What kind of blithering nonsense are you trying to ——"

At that instant the king bee buzzed to the ceiling and dropped heavily to the very center of the table, beyond the reach of any of them. Erecting his antennae vertically he shot out the command, "Please place hands on table before you."

Sharples did so at once, and the others were so flabbergasted at their first taste of telepathic reception, that they followed suit. The Russian, Shofvoff, was the last to comply, and he kept his fists clenched suspiciously. "No mohnkey biznezz, now!" he glared at Sharples.

Rotating his antennae slightly, the king bee continued to buzz loudly, and it covered the sound of the six queen bees.

Suddenly Sharples felt a pierc-

ing stab at the base of his skull. The pain shot deeply into his corded neck muscles, as he grabbed with both hands. The queen bee escaped before he could crush her.

Around the table the others were swatting and clawing at the backs of their necks, too. Angry yips and roars echoed from the bare walls of the chamber, then quieted suddenly as they all sank back to their seats.

The subdued light was suddenly more than their eyes could bear, and each ducked his head in arms, face down on the table. Sharples felt the inflammation sweep through his brain with each pulse, and he became aware that he was suffering more pain than just his own. The pain of the other five men was beating against his mind with throbs only slightly less severe than his own physical distress.

Even in his misery, he felt the king bee's triumph swelling up. Rapport was established!

After a few minutes all were able to raise their heads. The pain had passed, and they looked into each other's eyes incredulously.

At first Sharples was repelled by the sharp prickles of hostility, resentment and fear that emanated from the others. Amazingly, he found the flavor of his own President's brain as alien as the others.

Then the superficial differences vanished like a thin fog, and he probed more deeply. A great relief came over him. These men from across the seas were not beasts nor enemies —— nor even strangers. Their stuff was the same as his. Their feelings, basic emotions, desires were all so coincident to his own that the froth of fear and distrust was nothing to compare to the vast ocean of affinity they all shared.

Instead of a log jam of conflict among them, their nationalistic differences now appeared as fragile bubbles, and even as he noted them, some of these burst from the tenacity of their own prejudices.

A clear, directed thought struck through to all of them. "Effect of special stings will wear off in few hours. No more where they came from —— took us all summer to condition these queens —— so get at problems! How will you sell peace to your govmints?"

The king bee lowered his belly to the shiny table, relaxed his hairy, spraddled legs and listened as the conference got under way in earnest.

As promised, the remarkable, sensitizing venom wore off before noon, but much had been accomplished. Within a few minutes of each other, each delegate felt the precious rapport weaken and slip away.

It was with deep regret that Sharples lost the faculty, and he sympathized with the Frenchman when he exclaimed: "Mon Dieu! This was terrifique! How much, how much we have done! But we must not let this secret escape us. It is ——"

Even Shofvoff had moisture in his blue, slavic eyes. The others nodded and appealed to the king bee.

"Sorry," he told them. "This was strictly emergency. Are over hump now. Can figure things out separately from here."

Temple, the magnificent British orator, stammered, "But nothing mankind can produce in the way of communication can ever equal this. You must give us the secret!"

"No, and I'll tell ya why," the king bee said directly. "Like I told Sharpy, lower creatures all proud of human race. Pull damn fool tricks sometimes, but we not your equals in brains. Only thing we got is this way of talking. Must be good reason why man never developed it. Think I got it figured out."

"What conceivable reason could you have for denying us such a fabulous gift?" the President of the United States demanded.

The king bee fiddled his antennae a moment. "Look," he said, "bees been doing things same way since creation. So've ants and the rest. And why? Because all think same way. Somebody gets new thought and it instantly shouted down by whole hive —— *that ain't the way to do it —— never been done that way before —— what're ya tryin' to be, a big shot?*

"So what happens? No real individuals with private opinions. Everything's gotta run smoothly. Get a different notion how to run things —— bingo, get stung back into line.

"Humans different. Bicker and bitch among selves alla time, but got privacy of own *opinions* no matter how hard somebody beats on outside to make think different.

"So keep coming up with new ideas and make some progress, just because not forced to think alike."

Sharples frowned. "But you told me that the drones were charged specifically with the task of thinking."

"Yeah, same thoughts over and over, beatin' em deep inside us to get passed on to next generation. Took us eight years to decide just on this one project of contactin' human race. Hell, mighta got blowed up a long time ago if humans hadn't stalled off this long."

Foo Ting bowed his head thoughtfully. "Bee wisdom deeper than king bee realize. May we not maintain contact with your culture in future?"

"Sorry," the king bee said. "I'm only one of my kind. The littler ones can't generate enough juice to get across to human mind. Sure, you can talk to us, but won't get answers."

Cologne was on his feet excitedly now. "We mustn't let this secret escape us. We must force this —— this creature to reveal the substance or drug they used."

"Force?" the king bee said quizzically.

"By torture if necessary," the Russian agreed. "Keep the room

sealed until we capture the whole lot of them ——"

The king bee sounded sad. "Should listen to Chinese gentleman. He catches idea."

Foo Ting nodded. "I fear so. It is better this way."

"Anyhow," the king bee assured them, "we used up all juice on you, and you not to make me tell anything you oughtn't know." He lowered his antennae, and extended his transparent wings stiffly, exposing his body.

All six of the queen bees converged on the table. As the delegates ducked instinctively the hum passed over their heads. In a second the king bee was covered with the females.

Shofvoff laughed. "They think they are protecting him."

"Look closer," said Foo Ting quietly.

Even as he spoke the queen bees dropped from the king's body, one by one, and from each a thin thread of body fluid ran from abdomen to stinger which was left in the great, regal, gold-banded body of the king bee.

The king raised his feelers one last time. They leveled at the Secretary of State. The message came weakly but understandably. "Thanks for cooperatin', Sharpy. You done good. Real —— good."

THE EARLY BIRD

by MILTON LESSER

Kenniston dropped his spoon with a clatter. "You mean to say you eat this swill every day?"

His two companions looked at each other uneasily. One said: "It ain't so bad, Mr. Kenniston. Really, after you get used to it it ain't so bad. Elbow Forks is a small town, and this being the one restaurant —"

"Nuts," said Kenniston. "Hick town, hick food. I shoulda come prepared. But hell, I thought there'd at least be something a man could eat."

"It ain't so bad," the man said again.

The other man looked up from his plate. "How far you say you'd come, Mr. Kenniston?"

"Too far. Too damned far. But I gotta keep up my reputation. First man to pay way into the Chicago Fair. First car over the George Washington Bridge. First in the New York World Fair. First car to enter that new tunnel last year. Yessir, I got a reputation to keep up. Even if you had arsenic in this swill, it wouldn't stop me."

"What all them things get you, Mr. Kenniston?"

"Get me? Why, they didn't get me nothing." Kenniston wiped his fat lips with a napkin and lit a cigar. "What the hell? It's a challenge, that's all. Hundreds of guys wanta be first, and there's a big rivalry always going on. I gotta pretty good record, and I intend to keep it that way, that's all. Funny thing. The wife thinks I'm nuts. Nuts, y'hear? Always running off to be first here, first there — why don't you make more money instead, she says. I tell her to sit on her fanny and relax, I'm in charge." At this Kenniston began to laugh and he choked a little on his cigar smoke. The other two men watched him politely.

"So I come out here to — what's the name of this burg?"

"Elbow Forks. The main highway bends around the mountain down the road a bit, and it's shaped just like an elbow."

"Yeah, Elbow Forks. If that stinking army thinks it's going to stop me . . . Damned brass hats."

"The army knows what it's doin', Mr. Kenniston. They're up against something they don't understand, they gotta make restrictions. A man could get hurt —"

"A lotta crap just so some army brass can get the credit, that's all. But he's not going to get it from me. I been first too many times not to know the score. Dangerous, my eye. One of them saucers finally lands, so they slap military restrictions all over the place. A man's gotta be sophisticated enough to take all this with a grain of salt. All right, it ain't from Russia. It ain't from any-

place on earth. They know that. So it ain't dangerous. If it was dangerous, all them saucers before woulda done something. But they *didn't* do a thing—just flew around, that's all. Now one lands on your damned mountain, and I'm going to be first man up there. You just let that army try and stop me, that's all."

"I don't know—"

"You bet your backside you don't know. That's the trouble. Everyone's scared. No reason at all, but they're scared. If that isn't so, they'd have been up to that saucer a week ago. But they don't know, and they're too scared to find out. Some loudmouth is likely to get too scared, and they'll bomb that damned thing to hell before anyone can see it. I want to be up there first, that's all. You can't blame me. I got nothing to be scared of."

"Have you seen the colonel in charge?"

"Seen him? Nuts. They won't let me. I saw a corporal, and he let me see a second lieutenant. That's as far as I could go. They're all so scared they don't know what to do. 'I'll have to ask the captain, only he's busy,' he told me. Nuts. Then the captain would ask the major; the major would ask the lieutenant colonel; he'd ask the colonel who'd be as scared as the rest of them; and they'd have to send to Washington for an order. By that time, they'd either bomb that saucer to hell or it would go away. Well, I'm just not waiting, that's all. This is something new, and I'm going to be the first inside."

Kenniston burped a little and patted his mouth with a napkin. "Damned stew!" he said. "What was in it, horse meat?"

"Where do you think it's from?"

"How in hell should I know? Might be Mars. I been doing some reading since it came, and they say there might be life on Mars. Just like them, though. They say there might be, but then again there might not. So how in hell should I know? I'm only a layman, I'm not an authority; but I'll do something no authority ever does: I'll find out for myself, that's what I'll do."

"When do you plan on goin', Mr. Kenniston?"

"Hard to tell. It's just a question of when I can get by without that stupid army sticking its two cents in. They're so scared they're liable to shoot at that thing or bomb it before I get the chance, so I'll have to hurry."

"You want some beer?"

"Yeah. Yeah, that's a good idea."

In a few moments the waiter put three bottles of beer down on their table, along with three glasses, and departed. "Well, at least this will be better," said Kenniston. "It's bottled." He poured a glassful and then began to drink.

"Nuts," he said. He put the glass down and wiped his fat lips again, then wiped the sweat off his face with the napkin. "If they

don't know what an ice box is in this town, why didn't you tell me? That stuff's lukewarm."

"We could have the waiter put some ice in it —"

"Ice in beer? You crazy? Hick town —"

Kenniston was glad when he got outside. It was hot and humid, even for this time of year, but at least the greasy smell of that stew cooking was gone. How anyone would want to eat stew in this weather Kenniston did not know, yet because it was the blue plate special for this evening, his two companions had ordered it, and a bowl for him as well. They meant well, of course, but that was about the worst thing Kenniston could say for anyone. They meant well but they just couldn't do any better because they were a couple of hicks in a hick town, and now Kenniston was glad they had remained behind in the Elbow Forks Diner and he was outside in the fresh air.

He thought: *now, why the hell didn't that saucer land near Chicago?* Elbow Forks: it might as well have been Tibet for all the comforts the town could provide.

A soldier smiled politely to him. "Curfew in fifteen minutes, sir. You'll hafta be off the streets —"

Kenniston growled, "I know it, I know it. Damn it, man, don't you think I can read? I know it."

The smile left the soldier's little-boy face as he continued down the street, the big rifle slung over his shoulder, the bayonet fixed and ready.

A fine kettle of fish, thought Kenniston. *One stinking saucer lands in a town with the population of a Chicago apartment house, so they declare martial law. What the* hell *would happen if there was a war?*

Ahead Kenniston could see a few officers coming from the direction of their headquarters in the schoolhouse. They nodded as they approached, and Kenniston said:

"What happens if I don't get off the streets when curfew comes?"

"You're joking, of course."

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm joking. But suppose, that's all. What happens?"

"Well, you'd be restrained forcibly, and probably thrown in jail. And if one of these young kids got trigger happy, you might even be found dead the next morning. Ha, ha. Well, curfew in ten minutes. See you, sir."

To himself Kenniston said, "He's damn right he'll see me. He'll see my picture in the papers, that's what he'll see. First man Kenniston does it again. Greets visitors from space while army stands by trembling. Everyone was afraid to make the first move, they all said let the saucer or what's inside make it. But Kenniston climbed that hill and went inside and today the President receives him in Washington —" It was pleasant thinking.

Kenniston was near the general

store when the curfew whistle blew. He had had no specific plans for this night, but suddenly he found himself darting into the alley that served as a delivery entrance. Up ahead the alley turned sharply, almost forming the letter "L," and on the wall of the angle Kenniston could see the lights of the grocery truck. He came closer and he could hear the engine idling.

This was luck. Evidently the grocer had been late, and now he was stuck outside when the curfew sounded . . .

Kenniston was trotting when he reached the truck. He jumped inside and put the gears in first, then he turned and followed the other arm of the L-shaped alley to the street. Behind him he heard the grocer yelling:

"Hey you! You come back, Mister. I gotta get home in that truck. How'my going to get home now? Gee, Mister, come back!"

Five blocks down, at the end of Main Street, there was a barrier. Kenniston slowed the truck, and then he stopped altogether when two soldiers waved their arms in the glare from his headlights.

"Don't you know the curfew's sounded?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. But I was fixing up the store and I didn't realize it was so late – I'm sorry."

"Sorry? We could slap you in jail, that's what we could do."

"Well, I'll be heading right home now. Sorry."

"Okay, okay. Just don't let it happen again, that's all. It still could be Russians, you know. Or worse. We can't take any chances. You want we should escort you home?"

"No. No, thanks, You men stay with your road block. I'll be all right. And thanks again for your trouble."

The soldier nodded, and Kenniston drove away. He had studied the newspaper maps carefully, and now he remembered every detail well. You took the highway until you reached the turn which gave the town its name, and there you found a little dirt road. Two miles up this was the mountain – really only a hill, and there you found the thing from space, the saucer . . .

Kenniston hadn't counted on another road block. Now he cursed himself for a fool. Of course there would be a road block here. Just as the first block kept people from leaving town, so the second one would keep them from arriving in the vicinity after the curfew.

Just where the dirt road joined the highway Kenniston's truck was waved down. He climbed out slowly, a pleasant smile on his face, and the soldier said:

"Okay, buddy. Where the hell do you think you're going?"

"Why, no place. I just got lost and –"

"Lost? With all those signs along the road saying drive back

to town? You been drinking, buddy?"

"No. Honest."

"Well, suppose we just keep you here with us for the night and then we can tell the captain all about it in the morning."

Kenniston shrugged. He had come this far: a thousand miles to a stinking little town, and now he had stolen the truck. All would be forgotten, of course, once he was the first man to enter the saucer; but if these stupid soldiers stopped him, he might be facing a jail sentence. No one would believe that he had simply borrowed the vehicle . . .

The soldier stood between him and the truck, and Kenniston shoved out suddenly with both hands. The soldier fell back awkwardly, and for a moment he swayed against the mudguard, off balance. Kenniston leaned forward and the soldier yelled. Then Kenniston hit him,and the soldier fell.

"Hey! Did you hear that?"

"Sounded like Mac. Over at that truck. Trouble —"

Kenniston ran for the dirt road. He made it and then he kept running as he heard feet pounding along the pavement behind him.

"Stop! Stop, dammit, or I'll shoot!"

They meant it. Ordinarily their bullets might have been directed skyward, merely to frighten Kenniston. But now they had found their companion unconscious on the road, and they were frightened. If they saw Kenniston, they would shoot at him. They would shoot to kill.

He ran for a while up the road, and he could hear them following him. But he wasn't cut out for this sort of thing. Too many cigars and too much rich food and easy living had cut his wind and added inches to his waistline. To be first at the Chicago and New York Fairs meant remaining on line, motionless, for twenty-four hours; all he had to do at the tunnel and the bridge was stay in his car and wait for the go-ahead sign. But now he had stolen a truck, struck a soldier, disobeyed an order to halt — and he faced death if they could see him.

He staggered off the road a few paces and fell into a clump of bushes.

For a few moments he almost didn't care if the soldiers found him. Then at least he could rest, and it almost would be worth the consequences. But he changed his mind when they approached and he lay face down, trying to stifle the sobbing gasps which escaped his throat; and soon he heard them run past along the road, and in a moment their footsteps receded into silence.

Kenniston got up slowly. His breath had come back and now he had no reason to run. To his left was the hill, and atop it stood his quest. Let the whole world tremble over the unknown. That was the trouble with the world: everyone was afraid. You were

afraid and you didn't do anything, and the one guy who wasn't afraid had a jumping head- the rat race of life. Here and now, once and for all, he could show them. And he'd be famous in the bargain.

It was a cloudy night, but now, suddenly, the moon came out. It bathed the hillside in a liquid spray of white, and it made it easy for Kenniston to follow the trail to the top. Soon the hill leveled off and there was a flat stretch. Kenniston had seen aerial pictures—

They called the mountain which really was a hill Old Baldy, and Kenniston found out why. As the hill leveled off the vegetation disappeared, and Kenniston found the tiny plateau to be nothing but a barren expanse of rock, gleaming in the moonlight.

It seemed dull compared to the saucer. Kenniston stood there a long moment watching it, looking at the gleaming hemisphere which hardly looked like a saucer at all.

One thing he knew. It was a ship from — somewhere. From another world, and he, Kenniston, was the first one to reach it. First again, only all the other things were as nothing . . .

Kenniston approached. What would he find inside? Suddenly, momentarily, the thought worried him, but he pushed it aside. He'd know in a moment.

Something ahead of him made a loud clicking sound, and the orange beam came from the saucer, searching for him. At the last moment he tried to move back, but it was too late. The beam caught him and he stood engulfed in it for a moment. Then he began to scream, and soon the scream became a gurgle.

The amorphous mass of jelly which had been Kenniston clung firmly to the flat rock of Old Baldy, two and a half miles from the town of Elbow Forks, and watched the spaceship depart.

* * *

"I don't know why you killed it."

"Why? I was afraid, that's why. Such a horrible thing—"

"Our expedition is a failure, my friend."

"I know it. Don't you think I know it? They send us here, just two of us in a flimsy ship, and expect us to explore. How can we, two of us alone? It's frightening out there, that's what it is. If they want to do it right they ought to send a whole military expedition, organized, prepared for any emergency—"

"Like that thing?"

"Yes. Like that thing. Weren't you afraid, too?"

"Umm, yes. Awful—"

"So fleshy, and the matted fur atop its head, and *two* eyes, and that horrible facial orifice. Oooh—"

"I suppose you are right. It is indeed frightening, and there's no sense for the two of us to rush in and get ourselves killed. Next time they should send a fleet of army ships . . ."

OBEDIENCE GUARANTEED

by MACK REYNOLDS

When Cyril Gruber appeared at the spaceport, Jack Brand snapped him a salute and said, "How do you do, sir? All ready for blast-off?"

The Terran eyed him sourly. "What are you so cheerful about? I thought you Sarpedonians hated my guts."

The pilot forced his eyebrows up in simulated surprise. "Sir, the slogan of the Terra-Sarpedon Spaceways is the one word Courtesy. In that one word is embodied *Service, Friendliness* —"

The Terran politician grunted and pushed past him into the Zephyr. Jack Brand picked up the other's two suitcases and followed after, feeling a fraction better.

Being careful not to let his courtesy reach travesty, he fastened his passenger into an acceleration bunk and began buckling himself into another.

Gruber grunted, "I thought you were the pilot; shouldn't you be up forward?"

"I'm letting my co-pilot take off, Mr. Gruber. He can do it more easily than I. This Zephyr is souped up to the point where the take-off acceleration is high; frankly, I'd rather be in an acceleration bunk than in the pilot's seat."

The Terran official sneered. "That doesn't show much in the way of efficiency on the part of Terra-Sarpedon Spaceways. If the co-pilot's better than you, why isn't he the pilot? I've noticed a great deal of this sort of slackness."

Jack Brand said gently, "He's a robot, sir. Robots aren't allowed by law to be full pilots. But they're more efficient for extreme acceleration."

Gruber glowered at him. "Are you trying to be condescending with me, young man?"

Brand relaxed comfortably and pushed a control button to signal RP VIII that they were ready for blast-off. "I'm sure that wouldn't be courteous, sir." He added, to himself, *"If I ever get this makron to Terra without strangling him it'll be a miracle."*

They began to hear the roar of the take-off jets, and in split seconds speech was impossible. Then, flooding over them, came the subsonic vibrations with all their frightening, mind-terrifying fears.

The floor rose, seemingly, as their bunks sank with acceleration and they were spaceborne.

In a few short minutes, the pilot unstrapped himself and then his passenger. Acceleration was at slightly more than one G now, so they had gravity.

"There you are, sir," Brand said. "And now would you like

me to show you the facilities of the ship?"

A Zephyr was meant for a more sizable passenger list than one corrupt Terran official; sixteen was its usual complement, aside from the crew. It had a small lounge, complete with automatic bar, a smaller dining room, and, of course, the cabins. It was comfortable enough — enough, that is, for the ordinary space traveler. Jack Brand was to find that it wasn't for Cyril Gruber.

While he was being shown his quarters and the other attractions the craft had to offer, Gruber growled, "You mean you're letting that robot pilot us all this time?"

Evidently the man had never been on a small spacecraft before. Certainly he wasn't up on his knowledge of inter-planetary travel.

Jack Brand brought out his ancient briar and began to load it. "Yes, sir. They make ideal pilots. They obey each order you give them faultlessly. It's impossible for a correctly functioning robot to make a mistake. Actually, they're better pilots than any human; it's only tradition that keeps that law against robots becoming full pilots."

"Young man, are you criticizing the laws of the Council?"

The pilot stared at him as though he didn't get the question. "Of course I am. I thought one of the basic fundamentals of our government was that the moment a law became outworn it should be discarded."

"Well, criticizing the government —"

"Listen," the pilot began to boil over, "governments were meant to be criticized. When they get to the point where they can't stand it, they need it more than ever."

They were glowering at each other now.

The Terran snapped, "Are you accusing the government of the Council of being inept?"

"All I said was that there's nothing wrong with criticizing either an individual law or a whole government. When the time comes that you can't criticize anything you want to, then any talk of democracy is poppycock."

Gruber stiffened and his lower lip went out in a child-like pout. "So this is the vaunted courtesy of the Terra-Sarpedon Spaceways."

Jack Brand caught himself. He knew there was a recorder on board grinding away every moment. Ever since the Terran had been in the Sarpedon system every word he had spoken had been recorded; they had been doing everything possible to get something on the unsympathetic bureaucrat. So far, Brand knew, they hadn't had much luck. However, the recorder worked both ways; he, Jack Brand, was also *ipso facto* under observation. He'd have to watch himself. The boss, Allen Shirley, would eat him out but plenty if he gave Gruber

grounds for complaint on this trip.

He said now, "Why, sir, accept my apologies. I'm afraid I become somewhat enthusiastic about these subjects. I'll never discuss them with you again. We started with robot pilots, and it was your questions that brought up the matter of my opinions on government."

Gruber grunted, "I still hate the idea of those damned robots."

"But why, sir? They're the ideal worker, the ideal servant. Consider the leisure time they make possible for humans."

The Terran grumbled something under his breath, then said aloud, "I'm going into the salon for a drink."

"Very good, sir. I'll be in the pilot's compartment if there's anything I can do. If you care to eat, you'll find the services completely automatic. Just sit yourself at any table and press the button opposite those dishes you select from the menu on the table top."

"I know how to order my own meals," Gruber growled.

Jack Brand watched him waddle away down the corridor. "I'm sure you do," he said politely as the plump figure disappeared into the salon.

He was beginning, by the third day out, to wish he'd asked Allen Shirley for a human co-pilot if only for the sake of companionship. Of course, RP VIII could carry on a conversation of sorts, but it was limited. He could ask the robot how far he thought they were from Sarpedon, or Terra, or Sol; or he could ask him what the temperature might be, that sort of thing, and, of course, get a perfect answer. But anything beyond—that was out. A robot was literal, and trained for his particular job. It didn't lead to complicated conversations.

And conversation with Cyril Gruber was more an ordeal than anything else. The Terran spent most of his waking hours in either the dining salon or the lounge, swilling down tremendous quantities of Martian *woji* and of food. He was usually surly or argumentative; sometimes both. Jack Brand avoided him to the extent possible.

The last time they'd met had been in the salon and it would have been an impossibility to have eaten separately without obvious offense. The pilot joined the Terran at the other's table.

Gruber had obviously got himself a comfortable edge on before deciding to eat. While they were waiting for their orders he growled, "I understand that you Sarpedonians don't think much of annexation by the League."

Jack Brand said politely, "I thought you preferred not to discuss political opinions with me, sir."

"I didn't ask *your* opinion. I was talking about the Sarpedonians as a whole," Gruber said.

"I see. Well, the way I un-

derstand it, sir; the Sarpedonians wish entrance into the League, but they think that there would be considerable advantage in waiting another year or so. These interstellar matters sometimes become quite complicated and the advantage in a system as far off as Sarpedon being a first class colony rather than a third, is obvious. A first class colony is actually autonomous; a third or fourth class has to wait upon decisions from Terra."

Gruber rumbled in his throat but didn't argue the point. He said, instead, "You Sarpedonians don't exactly like me, do you?"

Jack Brand said carefully, "Are you asking *my* opinion or those of the Sarpedonians? My own opinion is personal and I'd rather keep it to myself."

Red was creeping up the Terran's collar. "I'm not interested in your opinions. I mean the Sarpedonians as a whole!"

Brand buttered a roll. "Most Sarpedonians," he said quietly, "think you're a *makron*."

The bulky little bureaucrat came to his feet, his fist tightening around his knife. The pilot's face was expressionless. This was being recorded, it would be the perfect excuse, a wonderful out. As skipper of the Zephyr, he'd be in a position to arrest the man and return with him to Sarpedon. By the time Gruber was released, the Council would have met and the danger period passed.

But Cyril Gruber knew better.

He stared, narrow eyed, at the pilot. "I know," he snarled, "you want to provoke me. You want something to happen to prevent me from getting to Terra on time. You know better than to sabotage this trip, but you'd like some excuse to prevent my arrival."

To himself, Jack Brand muttered, "You ain't just a whistlin' *Terra Forever,* fat boy."

Gruber's lower lip went out in its characteristic pout. "Well, it won't work, do you understand? It won't work."

"All right," Brand said easily. His own anger had cooled at the other's heat. In fact, he was almost enjoying himself—if only the other wasn't going to have the last laugh.

The Terran official slumped back into his chair and began arranging his dishes before him. "Another thing," he growled belligerently, "keep that damn robot away from me. He came into the lounge this morning."

"Sometimes RPVIII's duties take him to various parts of the ship; it can't be avoided. Why don't you take it easy? Robots can't possibly harm anyone; in fact, you might make a certain amount of use of him. Any robot, unless especially constructed for an individual, will obey any command any human gives him."

The Terran began to eat hoggishly. His mouth full, he said, "Maybe that's my complaint. You can't get a rise out of the things. All they do is obey, obey, *obey!*

Can't even understand an insult, let alone *resent* one."

The pilot stared at him. What kind of mind did Gruber have that he could hate robots because he was unable to insult one to the point of resentment? Brand shook his head and returned to his food.

After a time Cyril Gruber said, "I've figured out why you Terra-Sarpedon Spaceways people have been so cooperative about this charter trip back to Terra."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. You figure that you won't give me any excuse to take the lines out of the hands of your Sarpedonians and return them to, ah . . more capable operators."

"Such as your friends?" Brand blurted.

The Terran smiled with satisfaction. He'd got his rise, and his answer. He returned to his piglike consumption of his food. When his mouth was full again he said, "It'd take quite a bit, wouldn't it Brand, to provoke you to the point where you'd prevent me from getting to Terra on time?"

Jack Brand said, "It'd take an awful lot, Mr. Gruber. I'll get you to Terra in time for the Council meeting if humanly possible."

The other's smile broadened. "I see. You figure that much as you'd hate to have me make my report, it'd be worse still if I could later prove that the Sarpedonians deliberately prevented me from returning to Terra."

The pilot continued to eat. No answer was necessary. He knew what the other was doing—trying to take out on him what he couldn't accomplish with the robot.

"You know," the Terran went on smoothly, "I was rather interested in your opinions on government the other day."

Okay, Brand thought, *let him slug away. He can't get to me. I can take all the guff he can hand out.*

"This idea of complete democracy, you'll be surprised to learn," Gruber went on conversationally, "isn't thought of so highly in some circles—some very influential circles." He waved a plump hand airily. "Don't misunderstand; we'll keep the pretense, but the institution is somewhat—shall we say — outworn? Democracy is a beautiful ideal, but rather impractical."

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about," Jack Brand said softly.

"Ummm, of course not," Gruber nodded. "It's been quite undercover. In fact, I'm not sure that I should be telling you this."

"Telling me what?"

"That far more is at stake than Sarpedon at the Council meeting soon to take place. In fact, following my return, our group is determined to take some rather drastic steps. Yes. And now that I think of it, your comments on our space laws and on criticism of the government will bear looking into. That'll have to be an early

item on the agenda when I've instituted the the Interplanetary Security Police."

Jack Brand got up from the table and looked down at the fat little man. He could feel himself trembling in the attempt to suppress his passion.

"You're lying," he whispered. "You're saying that your return is going to trigger off a reactionary undermining of the government. You're lying. You're trying to provoke me into sabotaging your return."

The Terran's eyebrows went up. "My dear boy," he purred, "how can you say that?" His smile was broader now. "You misunderstood my words."

The pilot threw his napkin to the table and turned on his heel and made his way to the pilot's compartment.

So he'd thought that Gruber wouldn't be able to get to him, eh? He should have known better. The little Terran was a past master at the art.

And perhaps he wasn't lying. If he wasn't, it was a stupid thing to have said, but possible. The corrupt little official was going stale on this trip without companions and with the steady drinking he was doing. With his love of irritating, antagonizing, infuriating—he might have been goaded, inwardly, to making the revelation just to enjoy the spot in which he'd put Brand.

RPVIII was at the controls, watching emotionlessly the dials, the instruments, the scanner screen.

It was pointless, but somehow with Brand, automatic. He said, "Hello, Eight, how are you?"

The robot said, "I function properly."

Jack Brand slumped into his pilot's chair.

The way it stacked up: If Gruber *did* get to Earth, Sarpedon would be fouled up by his report to the Council; but, more important, if he *didn't* get to Earth the Terra-Sarpedon Spaceways would be accused of inefficiency and taken over by Terrans. Now, more important still — if true — if he *did* get to Earth he was to act as ringleader of a group interested in undermining the most efficient government man had as yet evolved.

He only let it go through his head once, and then cut it out. It was crazy. There was nothing he could do in the way of figuring it out. The Terran was either lying, or he wasn't. Jack Brand had no way of knowing which. He got up from his chair again and made his way to his room where he took two sleeping pills and climbed into his bunk. The robot could handle the ship — as a matter of fact, not even the presence of the robot was necessary on the bridge. There would be three more days of flight without need of change of course or velocity.

He awoke to find that the period of rest had done him little

good. He tried to keep the Terran's words from his mind — without success. They were there as soon as he was conscious again. What was the expression that Allen Shirley had used when assigning him to this charter trip? He was doomed if he did, and damned if he didn't.

He ate a tasteless breakfast, thankful only that the Terran bureaucrat wasn't in the dining salon. The complications of the situation were getting him down Of course, he could always reveal what the other had said, and could back up his charges with the recordings; but all Gruber would have to do would be to laugh it off and say he was kidding Brand. Or, if the coup d'état *did* go through, Gruber would be in a position to suppress the accusation.

He left his breakfast half finished and wandered listlessly up to the bridge to make his routine check.

RPVIII sat there motionlessly, watching the scanner. Brand said, "How are you, Eight?"

"I am functioning properly."

Jack Brand glanced into the scanner and scowled. "What's our position?"

"I don't know."

"WHAT?"

"I don't know our position," the robot's flat voice replied.

The pilot shot another frantic look at the scanner. Aldeberan should have been coming up. It wasn't.

He rushed to the navigation table, grabbed the star chart they had been working from and spun back to the scanner. It took only a moment to realize that they were completely off it.

"Where are we?" he roared at the robot.

"I don't know."

He looked at the velocity gauge. It was far beyond the speed at which they had been traveling.

"How long have you been accelerating?"

"For seven hours."

He spent the next three hours in trying to orientate himself in space, and couldn't. They were in hyper-space and during the time he'd been away from the bridge, they'd had the opportunity to get far, far off their course. It might take weeks for him to locate his position and even when he did, their fuel supply was such that he would have to return to Sarpedon, rather than trying to make Terra. Despair welled up inside him.

The robot was obviously worthless. Something had gone definitely wrong with it. The best he might expect would be to salvage something from its brain.

He snapped, "Why did you do this, Eight? Why did you leave our course?"

"The passenger ordered me to."

The pilot stared at the robot in shocked surprise. "You mean Gruber told you to—"

"Yes."

Jack Brand stormed from the

bridge and hurried his way down the corridor to the ship's lounge. The Terran official was there, glass in hand, drink-stupfied face.

"You won't get away with it," the pilot roared, "there's a recording being made of every word said on this ship. When you ordered the robot to alter our course, every word of it was taken down. Don't think you can accuse our spaceline of inefficiency."

The glass shattered in the other's hand. "What are you talking about?" he shouted back. "What d'you mean?"

Jack Brand shook his fist in the bureaucrat's face. "Don't give me that *nork!* You told the robot to alter our course. It won't work, Gruber! We won't get to Terra, but it's *your* fault—you understand?—and I can prove it!"

The little official slumped back into his chair, suddenly sober, comprehension dawning on his face. "No," he said, "I've got to get to that Council meeting. Everything depends on me. I've *got* to!" He stared wildly at the pilot.

Jack Brand glared back at him. unbelievably, the man didn't seem to be lying.

Cyril Gruber said falteringly, "The robot came in here shortly after you'd retired. He was bothering me."

"Robots never bother humans," Brand snapped. "What did you say to him?"

The Terran ran his tongue over a dry mouth and his lower lip came out in a pout. "He was making a noise cleaning up, and I was trying to think."

"What did you say to him, you silly fool?"

The Terran whispered, "I
I told him to go get lost."

KID ANDERSON

by PHILIP LATHAM

"You won't beat Angelloti that way."

"I know it."

The same thought had been in Brad's own mind so long that he had answered automatically without realizing the words had come from someone else. Then he saw the dark figure framed in the doorway of the barn. He scowled. He hadn't heard the door open. And he didn't like strangers watching while he worked.

"Punching the heavy bag's no good," the man told him, sauntering inside. "What you want is something that moves around."

Brad had a notion to tell him to keep his advice to himself. Instead he sat down on a bale of hay and pulled off his gloves. The battered alarm clock on the wall told him his time was almost up anyhow.

"Sparring partners cost money," Brad said, wiping himself off with a damp towel. "I'm doing the best I can."

The man stood with his legs apart regarding him out of the corner of his eye. Now that he was closer Brad was surprised to see that he was only about thirty, not much older than himself. He looked familiar. Probably somebody he had met a long time ago. He met a lot of people.

The stranger rested one foot on the bale of hay.

"You licked Angelloti once. What was the matter last time?"

"He was tougher, I guess," Brad shrugged.

"He'll be tougher this time."

"You a reporter or fight fan or what," Brad demanded sharply.

The stranger selected a long clean straw from the stack beside him and began winding it around his thumb. "I own you," he announced casually.

"You're crazy. Lindy Joyce—"

"Not anymore." The stranger exhibited a legal-looking document. "I bought your contract. From now on you're working for me. For Ben White."

For an instant Brad burned with fierce resentment. Then he sank dejectedly back on the bale of hay. The hell with Joyce. After all, what had that S.O.B. ever done for him? And this guy didn't look so bad.

"I guess you must like to play longshots," he muttered.

"Nope. I like to play sure things." White unwound the straw and tossed it away. "I got a brand new angle on this training business. An angle nobody ever heard of before. Come out here and help me with this box."

Brad followed him obediently

outside the barn to where a station wagon was parked under the pepper tree. White opened the rear door and hopped inside. The interior was filled with boxes some of which were open at the top revealing what appeared to be electronic devices of some sort. One box in the middle was much larger than the others. Large enough to hold a man.

"Grab hold on that end there," White directed. "It's kind of heavy so get a good grip. We can lug the control stuff in later."

They carried the box in the barn and set it beside the crude ring Brad had built. The lid of the box was secured by a heavy padlock. White took a key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock.

"Meet Kid Anderson," he said, raising the lid. "Andy for short. You and Andy are going to get real well acquainted."

A dummy lay in the box dressed in trunks and sweatshirt. He had the build of a boxer with long arms and broad shoulders tapering down to a narrow waist. His face was nondescript without expression. It might have been anybody's face.

White glanced around the barn.

"Guess the best place for him is over against the wall on that bale of hay. I expect you can carry him better alone."

Brad gathered the dummy in his arms and set it on the bale of hay with its back resting against the wall. He judged it weighed about 150 pounds the same as himself. A welter-weight.

"Know why I named him Andy?" White said.

Brad shook his head.

"Short for android. An android is an automatic machine that resembles a human being. I'm mighty proud of Andy."

Andy's head drooped slightly. In the dim illumination he might have been a man who had fallen asleep for the moment. Even in repose there was a sinister quality.

White jerked his thumb at the heavy bag. "You can take that down right now. You're going to be working with Andy now."

"What kind of a gag is this?" Brad growled.

"Sleep pretty good, do you?" White inquired. He had a way of answering a question by countering with another one.

"Pretty good," Brad said.

"That's what I thought . . . pretty good. I know what you've been doing. You've been fighting Angelloti in your mind. Lying awake for hours thinking about all the things he might do to you. Right?"

"You can't seem to shut your mind off."

"Suppose . . . just suppose now you had all the money you wanted for training. What'd you do?"

Brad considered.

"Well . . . I'd try to get somebody that got the same sort of style as Angelloti. Somebody like

Tony Lopez or Cecil George, for instance."

"How'd you like Angelloti?"

"Angelloti!"

"Maybe not Angelloti in person. But a guy who's exactly like Angelloti without being Angelloti himself."

"It'd be like having your fight in advance," Brad replied slowly.

White rubbed his hands together briskly. "That's just what we're going to do. We're going to go through that fight in advance. It'll be just like you're working *with* Angelloti. Only Angelloti's going to be Andy."

"Sounds good," Brad said.

"Put it this way," White continued. "You're matched with a fellow. It's an important bout in your life. If you lick this fellow you're made. Naturally you want to know all about him. So what do you do? You get films of as many of his fights as you can. You watch 'em for hours. It helps but it doesn't help enough."

He waved his hand in the direction of the car.

"I've got films out there of all Angelloti's fights since he turned pro. Only with my outfit I don't just *watch* Angelloti. I've *got* Angelloti. I've got him bottled up so I can do anything I want with him. I can run him hard or easy or fast or slow or backward or forward." He lowered his voice as if he were afraid the figure against the wall might overhear. "I can even feed him into Andy."

He walked over to Andy and grasped him by the chin.

"Like to see the man you're going to fight? Watch this." He dug his fingers into the dummy's face molding and shaping it with quick sure touches. When he withdrew his hands the result was startling. Andy's blank expression was gone. In its place there appeared the scrambled features of Joe Angelloti.

Suddenly Brad felt very tired. His leg muscles were beginning to ache and he wanted a shower and the peace and solitude of his room.

White clapped him on the shoulder. "Think you can take him?"

Brad reached for his bathrobe.

"I'll murder the bum," he grunted.

Brad had never had a manager like White before. Never before had his manager taken such a deep interest in his personal life. White seemed to know all about him without having to be told. His first move was to change Brad's haphazard method of training and of living in general. He pointed out with unassailable logic that you succeed by doing the right things instead of the wrong things. You advance yourself by not making mistakes. You decide on your goal and then head directly toward it.

The changeover started next morning at breakfast. Brad boarded with his widowed aunt

who owned a strip of land and a farmhouse bordering on Highway 101. She had converted the front of the house into a curio shop where she made an uncertain living selling local mineral specimens and Indian relics to credulous tourists from the East. She had let Brad stay with her because he was an orphan and because it gave her a comfortable feeling to have a man around the house.

White frowned when he surveyed the breakfast that she set.

"This won't do," he declared firmly. "This won't do at all. Brad here has got to have plenty of eggs and bacon and potatoes and thick steaks."

"That costs money," his aunt retorted.

White took out his wallet and tossed a couple of twentys across the table. "I'll give you a list of groceries I want later. When that's gone let me know."

His aunt began to take a liking to Mr. White after that. The distinguishing trait of the other characters Brad had brought home occasionally was a lack of cash money. She had become very discouraged about her nephew. A man of his age had no business loafing around the house all day. He should have a nice office where he worked industriously and successfully from nine in the morning till five in the evening. In the course of time he should raise a family and make enough money to buy a nice house and car. Brad failed utterly to conform to this ideal. When not training he lay in his room poring over old papers and magazines or gazing at the colors emitted by a chunk of crystal. She had only a dim notion of Brad's professional activities in the ring. If he had misbehaved she would not have hesitated to take a swing at him herself.

After breakfast Brad helped White set up his equipment in the barn. It looked enormously impressive and complicated. Mechanical and electrical gadgets had fascinated him since he was a child. He had meant to become an engineer when his education was terminated abruptly in the sixth grade. White handled his instruments with careless ease. The most amazing part was that he could always make them work. Brad felt you could rely on White. He felt that White could make him function as readily as one of his instruments.

Late that afternoon White pronounced the equipment in working order and told Brad to get into his gym clothes. When Brad returned, his manager was rummaging in a suitcase filled with rows of bottles like a doctor's medicine kit. White took a bottle, unscrewed the top, and shook out a small object wrapped in yellow cellophane like a piece of candy. He removed the cellophane exposing a glittering metallic sphere no bigger than the seed of a cherry. He held the sphere up to the light so that it emitted rain-

bow colors like a piece of mother-of-pearl or a bird's wing.

"This sphere is Angelloti," White said solemnly. "It's surface looks smooth but it isn't. If you could see it under a high-power microscope you'd find it was all covered with grooves like a newly plowed field. When I put it in the machine these grooves will emit waves that act on Andy." He inserted the sphere in a slot on the instrument panel. "The grooves are on the surface of a sphere because waves mustn't follow any fixed pattern."

He showed Brad some other bottles in the trunk. Each bottle bore a label upon which was written a name and number.

"I got all the top-notchers here," he chuckled. "Now here's Jack De Soto, the third ranking heavy. And here's Ike McCann, the English middle-weight champ. This is Milt Kapek who scored a TKO over Willie Leon last month. I've even got you in here."

He took a bottle from the corner of the suitcase. Although the bottle bore a label it was blank.

Brad regarded it suspiciously. "How d'you know that's me?"

"You're my latest addition. I haven't got you tagged yet."

He restored the bottles to the suitcase and glanced at his watch. "We ought to get going. You want to warm up first?"

"Any time," Brad said, shadow boxing around the ring.

White followed his movements with interest. "It looks queer to see a fellow that boxes with his right hand stuck out. You a natural born southpaw?"

"Guess so," Brad said. He jabbed a couple of times with his right, bent low, and hooked with his left.

"Fighting a southpaw sure mixes some fellows up," White commented.

"Can't see it's ever been much help to me."

White turned back to the instrument panel and touched a switch which caused red and green lights to glow. Simultaneously a dozen indicators sprang to quivering life.

"Watch Andy," he murmured, slowly turning a dial.

For what must have been nearly a minute Andy remained as inert as a sack of laundry. Then gradually he began to stir and shift about like a wrinkled balloon being filled with air. At length he rose to a sitting position and turned his head deliberately from side to side. Suddenly he slid off the bale of hay and walked over to the center of the ring.

"Now I'm only going to run Andy at half speed so take it easy," White called out. "Okay—time!"

Before Brad knew what was happening a glove was pounding him in the face . . . once . . . twice . . . three times. He dived into a clinch and held on hard trying to get his bearings. But Andy shook him off and landed quick rights and lefts to his head and body. The blows were too light to hurt but there

was a feeling of suppressed power behind them.

Brad pulled back keeping his right extended to hold Andy off. This was the man he had to lick in another couple of weeks. He *had* to lick him. Brad began to loosen up. Soon he was blocking . . . ducking . . . countering instinctively without having to think. Several times he connected solidly with blows that would have been damaging had he put his full weight into them. At the end of the round he felt he had a slight edge.

"Well, what do you think of him?" White asked, at the end of the third round.

"He had me scared stiff at first," Brad admitted. "Gosh! He's more like Angelloti than Angelloti himself."

White grinned triumphantly.

"What did I tell you! Now you can take your time. Get him all figured out in advance. When you step in the ring you'll know all the answers."

Brad took a light poke at the figure hanging face downward over the ropes.

"You say you got him running 50 per cent of capacity?"

"I'll turn him up a little every day till we get to 75 per cent."

"But then I'll never know how tough he is," Brad objected.

"You'll know close enough. If you go too hard now you'll leave all your fight in the barn."

What had been a novelty soon settled down into routine. Each day White moved the dial a notch higher. Each day Andy grew a little harder to handle. But Brad was improving too. He felt stronger and more alert. He had never boxed so well. Six fast rounds with Andy scarcely got his wind up. He should have been feeling fine.

Instead he was possessed by an unaccountable restlessness. White had taken over his training program until every detail was planned and foreseen in advance. Life flowed by in a smooth velvety soft stream. Its very smoothness was irritating. Brad's mind became filled with queer fancies which frightened him but which also gave him a curious perverse sort of pleasure. Gradually he had come to hate White with a wholly unexplainable unreasoning hatred. Yet he was afraid to oppose White. White so obviously had his best interests at heart. White looked after him so carefully. He owed White so much. White was so *good* for him.

The one bright spot was Andy. Andy in the form of Joe Angelloti no longer bothered him. He knew all his tricks. He could anticipate his every move. He could cut him to pieces any time he cared to exert himself. Often he felt genuinely sorry for Andy until he remembered that he was running at only 75 per cent of his capacity. Could he still beat him if he were wide open? Brad wasn't sure. That was what he had to find out.

"I want Andy at 100 per cent

today," he told White when they met in the barn. "I got to know *how good I am.*"

White looked at him reproachfully. "I've brought you along as fast as I could. You're going into the ring right at your peak."

"Just one round."

White did not reply immediately. He replaced some bottles in the suitcase. He had received a new batch lately which he had been busy marking and recording. Brad itched to get at those bottles. From watching White he was sure he could operate the machine. With those bottles in his possession he could test himself at 100 per cent against every top-notcher in his division. What a chance! To study a man at leisure until he knew him thoroughly. From a third-rater he might become welter-weight champion. Might even aspire to the middle-weight crown.

White regretfully shook his head.

"Sorry, kid, can't do it. Seventy-five is the limit. We don't dare risk an injury this close to the fight."

Brad turned without a word and tore into Andy. He was blind mad. He was careless. He didn't do as well as he should. Andy caught him on the side of the jaw when he was a trifle off balance. It wasn't really a hard punch but it did something to him. The impact seemed to go on up through his head and explode in the back of his brain. All afternoon he tried to shake it off but it stubbornly refused to go.

The first Brad knew that something was definitely wrong was when he went in for his shower. The handles marked HOT and COLD on the water pipes were blank. Of course he knew the words must be there. By concentrating hard he made them come back but the letters were blurred and kept fading in and out. He ate a light dinner and then went at once to his room and threw himself on the bed without undressing. For a long time he lay still gazing dully up at a water spot on the ceiling watching it divide and coalesce and divide again. He never knew when he fell asleep.

He awoke in darkness. The house was still. He counted to 110 before a car whizzed past on the highway. That meant it was probably early in the morning. He was aware of the same sense of unnatural calm that he felt before entering the ring. Previously he had never tried to plan his fights but had simply done whatever seemed best as circumstances arose. This time he knew exactly what he had to do.

Without hesitation he slipped downstairs and out the back door. There was no moon. The wind blowing from the desert felt hot against his face. It set the dry bark of the eucalyptus trees to crackling and filled his eyes with dust. He was glad when he was in the barn at last and could see what

he was doing. Andy lay where they had left him sprawled on the bale of hay staring fixedly at the ceiling. Brad stripped and got into his ring togs hurrying as if they were already waiting for him. The sound of the rising wind in his ears was like the distant roar of the crowd.

Brad made a quick inspection of the instrument panel. The dials were set where White had left them that afternoon. Brad left them untouched except for one which he turned to 100. Next he threw open the suitcase and ran his eye along the rows of bottles. His eyes were smarting from the dust. He was carrying his gloves under his arm and without thinking he used them to dab at his face. That was bad, for the gloves were an old pair that had been used in the ring and might have resin on them. Finally he found the bottle he wanted. He examined the label carefully. When he was satisfied he inserted the sphere in the machine and turned on the switch.

Andy was struggling into life. Brad awaited him eagerly dancing on his toes his arms working effortlessly. His cares and worries had vanished. Never had he felt so light and free. It was the moment he had been waiting for so long.

Andy was gliding toward him in a half crouch, his chin tucked behind his shoulder, his right arm extended. . . .

When White entered the barn at dawn he found Brad stretched out face down on the floor with Andy bending over him with his arms dangling limply, a stupid expression on his face. He shoved Andy away and turned Brad over. Gently almost caressingly he ran his fingers over his head and neck. Already the body was growing rigid. Evidently he had been dead for several hours.

White went to the suitcase and reached for a bottle. As he had expected the bottle was empty. It was the only bottle with a label that was blank.

REVERSE PROCEDURE

by CHARLES ERIC MAINE

It was the illustration that first caught my eye — a color-photograph of a small plant with dagger-shaped leaves and a vertical spike of minute heather-like flowers glowing crimson against the dark green foliage. 'Aphina equesitina,' said the caption. 'Indian dreamweed from which the alkaloid aphinine is extracted.' The picture was set in the centre of an article on page eighteen of the *Medical Review*. I glanced at the title: 'Clinical Applications of Aphinine,' by Dr. Paul Levison — and then I remembered. . . .

Many years ago, before the war, Levison and I had studied medicine together, both intent on a medical career. We had been good friends, almost kin spirits, in fact; displaying a remarkable similarity in tastes and interests. But whereas he had in due course become a doctor, taking the examinations easily in his stride, I, lacking the essential urge, failed to make the grade, and eventually found a career in journalism.

As technical editor of a new magazine devoted to scientific progress and discovery, I made a point of reading all kinds of specialised publications, where obscure paragraphs are often signposts to important developments. And now, in the dignified and technical pages of the *Medical Review*, Levison's name brought back into my mind a host of forgotten memories.

I read through the article with rather more interest than the subject merited, learning that the plant Aphina equesitina was a wild herb common to certain mountainous areas of northern India and Tibet. It was related to Cannabis indica, or Indian Hemp. After maceration, the leaves yielded an extract containing an alkaloid called aphinine; and this substance, it seemed, possessed powerful narcotic properties. For this reason it had been classified as a dangerous drug.

There was something here of news value to a technical journalist, for the discovery of aphinine was a recent event, and its properties were still being investigated. But for once my news instinct was swamped by other emotions. I was curious to know what Levison had made of life; whether he was still the same tall, dark and sallow individual that I once knew; and whether he still maintained a certain interest in off-trail subjects such at Theosophy, Esperanto, interplanetary travel, and so on.

Accordingly, I resolved to call

on him to renew our friendship and reminisce; and in addition I might be able to find out some more about aphinine, and run a column or two about the new drug. So, about a week later, I found myself ringing the doorbell of a tall Edwardian house in Marle Street, near the famous Wimpole Street, London. I wasn't quite sure about the address; but as there was only one Dr. Paul Levison in the phone-book, I felt reasonably confident that this was the place.

A pretty blonde receptionist opened the door, and in response to my request for the doctor, asked: "Have you an appointment, sir?"

"Not necessary," I replied. "Dr. Levison is an old friend of mine, and he'll be only too pleased to see me."

She accepted this rather doubtfully, but without comment, and led me up two flights of broad red-carpeted stairs to a second-floor apartment. A small oblong ivory plate on the door bore the doctor's name. I pressed the bell.

After half a minute, with no response, I rang again; but it was not until I had pressed the button firmly for the fourth time that footsteps sounded beyond the door. It opened slowly, and I found myself smiling into a pale wan face, a melancholy and tired face, the face of my friend Paul Levison.

"Yes?" he said.

I held out a hand. "Paul. It's good to see you again. Don't you remember me?"

He frowned thoughtfully, then shook his head wearily. "No."

"I'm Cleary. Richard Cleary."

He kept on shaking his head in a blank automatic manner.

"Anatomy, dissection, Old Bramwell dropping cigarette ash into his precious culture of staphylococci at the University College . . . don't you remember."

He brightened perceptibly. "Of course. I remember Old Bramwell. But . . . who did you say you were . . . ?"

"Richard Cleary."

"Yes, I remember," he said finally, with an unflattering lack of enthusiasm. "Do come in."

I followed him into the apartment. One room was fitted out as a surgery for consultations: the other was simply but comfortably furnished in a modern style. A standard-lamp cast a soft diffuse glow onto the walls.

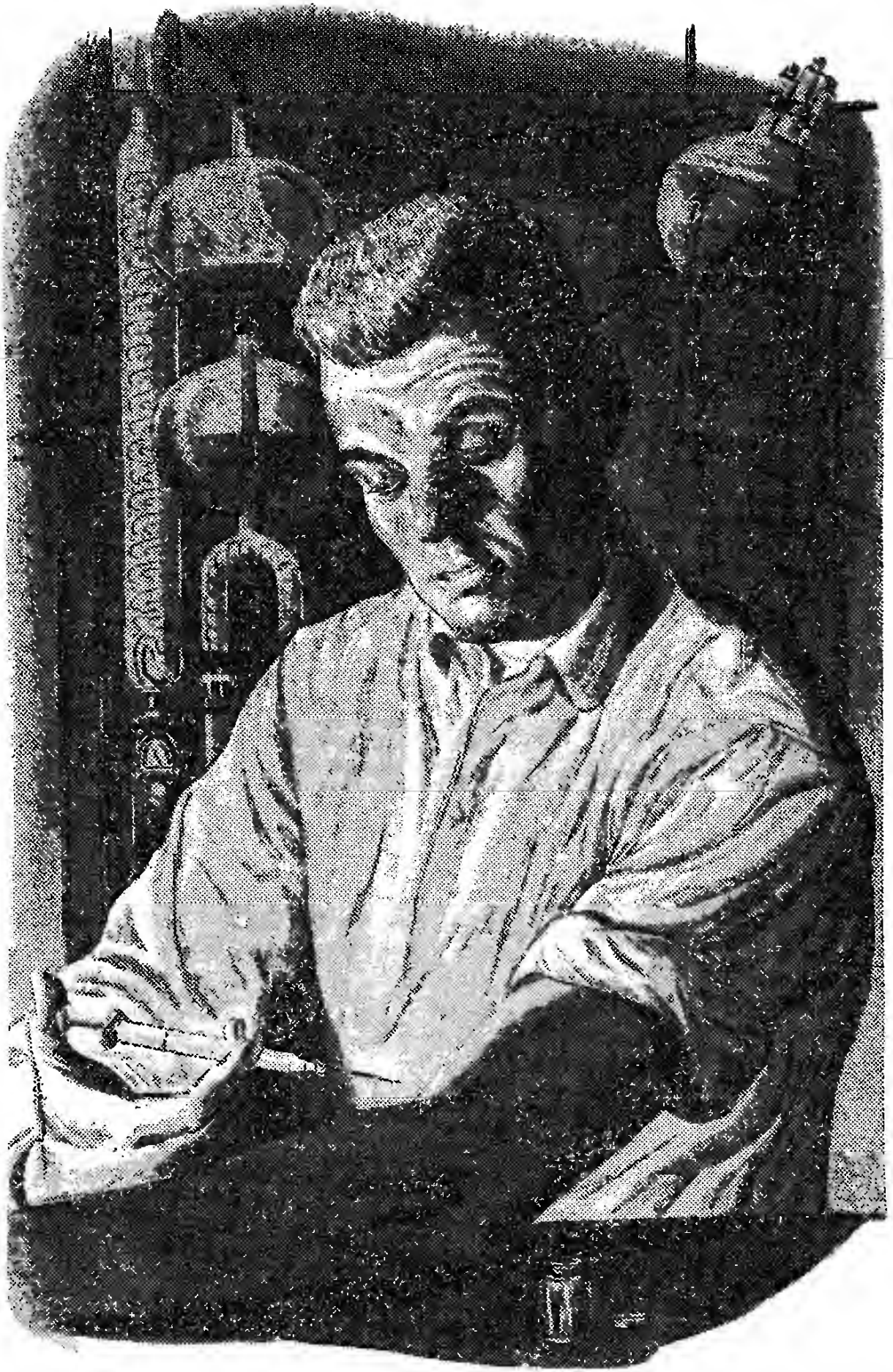
He motioned me into a chair. "Drink?"

I said yes, and he opened a virgin bottle of Scotch. Neither of us spoke until both glasses were empty. Then Levison said: "Yes, of course I remember you, Cleary. I'm glad to see you, too. You must forgive me if I seem a little vague .... I've been carrying out certain research which tires me."

"You look it," I agreed. "How's business — the practice, I mean?"

"Oh — fine. Just fine."

"What's the research? Aphinine?"



He looked at me in astonishment. "How did you guess?"

I explained how I had come across the article in the *Medical Review*, and mentioned my professional interest in the new drug from a technical editor's point of view.

Levison said: "Yes, I can tell you quite a lot about aphinine. It is a most interesting drug, from many aspects. In fact, I believe I am on the verge of a most important discovery; but until I am certain, until I have completed my research, I would prefer no mention of anything I may tell you in your paper."

"If you insist," I agreed reluctantly.

Then, changing the subject quite abruptly, Levison announced: "I'm following in the footsteps of Hahnemann. Did you know?"

"I didn't know," I said. Anyway, who is Hahnemann?"

"Was," he corrected. "Hahnemann is dead. He was a physician who first investigated the principles of homoeopathic medicine."

"Homoeopathy," I murmured thoughtfully. "Yes, I remember something about that. Curing likes by likes, isn't that it?"

"More or less. The idea is that any substance, drug or medicine will, if taken in sufficient quantity, produce symptoms characteristic of disease. For instance, cinchona will cause acute fever if administered in large doses; but it will also cure fever if given in small quantities. Or again, ipecachuana, which is a powerful emetic, will cause nausea in small doses. The symptom-pattern of the disease must be accurately matched to the symptom-pattern produced by the drug. Or—to quote Hahnemann's own words—'the healing power of medicines depends on the resemblance of their symptoms to the symptoms of disease.'"

"Mm ." I offered non-committally.

Levison went on to explain that, in order to know the full curative value of any drug or substance, it was necessary to discover the characteristic pattern of symptoms which it could evoke, and this was done by *proving* the drug. A homoeopathic practitioner, wishing to prove an unknown drug, would take regular quantities of it, perhaps on a daily basis over a period of weeks, starting off with a minute dose, and gradually increasing the amount until it became effectively poisonous. Symptoms were inevitably produced at some stage in the proving, and these were carefully observed and noted. When the proving was completed, a symptom-pattern was then on record, indicating the type of disease for which the drug would prove effective. Homoeopathic remedies were usually administered in small doses, sometimes so small as to be almost infinitesimal; but the question of quantity was left to the discretion and experience of the doctor. Proving and

symptom-matching were the all-important factors.

Well, aphinine was a new drug, and Levison was proving it homoeopathically. He had started six days ago, taking increasingly larger doses of the substance, finding out, by actual personal experiment, its particular symptom-pattern.

I recalled the cautionary words of the article in the *Medical Review* — the similarity of the new alkaloid to Indian hemp. "Isn't there a certain amount of danger in taking . . . dope?" I asked.

He smiled. "Even dope has its uses in homoeopathy — other than as a palliative. After taking aphinine for six days in increasing doses, I can assure you that it is indeed dope. But the proving will soon be over, I hope, for I fancy I am nearing the maximum safe dosage."

"I shouldn't take any chances with a practically unknown drug," I warned him.

Again he smiled. "But that is the very reason why I *am* taking chances — because it is an unknown drug. When the proving is over, it will no longer be unknown."

He paused for a brief interval, gazing reflectively at the standard-lamp, then continued . . .

"There's an unusual quality to this particular experiment which I have never encountered before, although I have carried out a complete homoeopathic proving of more than twenty substances. It's a little difficult to describe. There's a sense of — almost inner compulsion . . . no, not *quite* compulsion, but a feeling that in some way I knew I would eventually come upon aphinine . . . A sensation of purpose, if you see what I mean . ?"

"I'm afraid I don't . . ."

"I thought you wouldn't. Never mind — I shan't attempt to clarify the feeling. But quite apart from that, aphinine is an extremely interesting drug in many ways."

"What does it do?" I asked.

His reply was unexpected. He said: "You will shortly see for yourself, because I shall be taking a further dose of aphinine in a few minutes. I have to adhere to a ridgid time-table, you see. It will induce in me a trance-like condition — don't look concerned — I've experienced it before, and it's quite harmless. Now while in this state, I become aware of curious things. You remember how we used to talk about astral-projection and levitation at the College? Well, it's rather like that. I have dreams — very vivid dreams — always about the same thing. Unfortunately I can never remember the details clearly when I awake. That is where you come in."

"Where I come in ?" I echoed.

"Yes. In this way. I shall endeavor to describe everything that happens to me during the trance period. You will take down everything I say . you write shorthand, of course?"

"Yes —"

"Good. In that way we shall have a permanent record of what happens, which we can analyze later."

"I'm not sure that I like the idea of it very much," I commented doubtfully. "Playing with dangerous drugs is asking for trouble."

He made no reply, but crossed to a bureau and brought me a pencil and a pad. Then, with a murmured "Excuse me a moment," he left the room and went into the surgery. In a few seconds he came back with a measured quantity of white crystalline powder held in a watchglass. "Today's dose is ten grains," he said. Then, dissolving the powder in a small glass measure containing water, he swallowed it over.

"You can rest your pad on the desk, but turn the lamp-shade so that the light does not shine on me," he instructed, taking a seat in the darkest corner of the room. I did as he suggested, then waited, tense and expectant.

"Symptoms as usual," he dictated after a long silence; and I transferred the words to paper in sleek Gregg outlines. His voice went on quietly and dreamily. "Sensation of lightness — as though I have become weightless. Now a tingling in the extremities, particularly feet. Lassitude. Indisposition to talk. Accentuation of the heart-beat, with — with sound of throbbing in ears."

There was a short silence. I glanced at the shadowy form of Levison laying back in the easy chair — motionless, breathing heavily. Then: "Feeling akin to paralysis . . talk with difficulty. No bodily feeling at all. Ghostly clouds in vision — colored shapes and other aberrations. Sound of sea — like waves on beach . . ."

Another silence, during which I could hear my own heart pounding loudly in a queer mixture of apprehension and anticipation.

His voice came again, fainter this time, more incoherent. "Flying now —far above a forest. There is no sound but the roaring of the distant sea. The room has gone . . . old Cleary too. Wonder what he's doing now? Sitting watching my unconscious body, I suppose." Here Levison chuckled in amusement, and my own scalp tingled with some unnamable sensation; but I continued with my job, occasionally stealing a covert glance at the still figure in the corner.

"Far away there is a mountain range, where the river has its source. I am over the river now. How black and oily it looks in the evening light. Somehow this place seems familiar — there are elusive memories, but I cannot hold them . . .

"The forest is thinning gradually, merging into the fresher green of parkland.

"I can see a bridge spanning the river, and that is familiar too. I have held that rustic wooden handrail and trodden those weathered planks before — many times.

"This must be my destination,

for I am growing heavier, and am sinking slowly towards the ground. Strange . . . I had not noticed that I had no body. I was a discarnate entity floating through space. I must remember that when I get back — Chibbett should be interested." I suppose that here Levison was referring to Mr. H.S.W. Chibbett of the psychical research organization known as *The Probe*. Doubtless the two were acquainted.

He went on: "My body is gathering about me like a cloud — a condensing vapor — solidifying into the familiar concrete outlines of myself . . . yet, somehow, not myself. A different being with the same ego. And now — firm ground beneath my feet.

"The scenery is beautiful, but then, the valley of Lanoa is one of the most beautiful places on earth. It is twilight, I think. The crimson rim of the sun is creeping behind the gaunt black peaks of the Saakor mountains. And the river is a gigantic serpent gurgling sluggishly towards the distant sea.

"Memories are returning now. The bridge recalls the frantic struggle of the Lanoans to cross the river and gain fertile territory in the days when the Pratyri came down from the mountains and ruled the valley. The river resisted their attempts to cross, as though in league with the repulsive pygmies from beyond the Saakor peaks. It had writhed and contorted itself into treacherous whirlpools, sucking down the boats of my people — dragging down those who dared to swim in its loathsome depths. And then the bridge had been built, defying at last the antipathy of the river.

"I have to cross the bridge and follow the concealed trail through the edge of the forest to the village. They will not be expecting me, for they did not know when I would return. The woods are dark and mysterious now, full of black fantastic shadows. But I know the trail well, for I was one of the pioneers who led the defeated people of Lanoa along this very path into the valley which is now theirs.

"My mission . . . ? Failure again, as before. I can only hope that one of the others has succeeded in finding an antidote for the *thrayn*, the malignant virus that has destroyed so many of my people. The one weapon of the Pratyri against which so far we have found no defense .

"I see the village at last: the flat white buildings etched vaguely in the darkness through a mosaic of woodland foliage. Here is home, and Ylen . . . my Ylen . . ."

Levison's voice ceased abruptly. Until this moment it would seem that he had been speaking his thoughts aloud in the manner decided upon before the experiment; but all the time his voice had grown fainter and more indistinct, until it was no longer audible. I peered into the gloomy corner, a tiny prickle of apprehension rippling down my spine. Levison lay

perfectly still, his head on one side, his eyes staring vacantly upwards.

I crossed over to him, after turning the lamp so that it illuminated his body, and examined him. I had forgotten most of my medical training, but from the dilation of the eye-pupils and the cold rigidity of his body, it was a fairly simple matter to diagnose narcotic poisoning. He was not dead by any means, but I was not prepared to take any chances.

I pulled him from the chair, and laid him flat on the carpet, then slapped his face, and sprinkled cold water on him. This failed to produce any effect. In desperation I searched among the bottles in his surgery, and selected one labeled "Liq. Strych. HCL"—solution of strychnine hydrochloride. The maximum dose was marked on the label — 12 minims — but I carefully measured double this quantity, mixed it with a little water, and forced it down his throat.

The dose proved to be a much more powerful stimulant than I had anticipated. Such a quantity of strychnine, while capable of producing sickness in a healthy person, would just be about sufficient to counteract the narcotic effect of the aphinine in this case. After an interval of about ten minutes, which seemed to me more like an hour, Levison stirred and opened his eyes.

I breathed a sigh of relief. He picked himself up unsteadily, then stared at me uncomprehendingly. "Where is Ylen?" he asked thickly.

"Sit down and rest for a bit, old man," I suggested, ignoring his question. "The drug knocked you out."

He frowned, obviously perplexed. "Drug? It is still undiscovered. Ylen has the *thrayn* — I must do something. Who are you?"

I pushed him into the armchair. "I'm Richard — Richard Cleary. You know me . . . your friend. The journalist — Cleary."

"Then who am I?" he asked tonelessly.

I laughed. "Take it easy, Paul. You've had a very vivid dream, that's all. It's like coming out of chloroform. You're confused, but you'll be all right soon!"

This seemed to annoy him, for he stood up, his eyes flashing angrily. "Chloroform be hanged!" he cried. "What have you done to me. Cleary . . . yes, Cleary, I know you now." He laughed ironically.

Then — "You dragged me away from Ylen!" he said accusingly. "Why couldn't you leave me alone? She is ill — very ill."

I made no immediate reply, but took up the notebook covered with shorthand characters. "Listen," I said patiently. "I shall read something out to you. It will help you to orientate yourself correctly. You seem too mixed up between dreams and real-life."

He looked so pale and distraught as I commenced to translate my verbatim notes that I felt

a surge of pity for him. The drug had produced the characteristic sallow appearance of the addict, with the dark-ringed eyes and hollow cheeks. He seemed to have aged tremendously within the space of an hour.

When I had finished reading, I explained how I had administered strychnine to revive him. He thanked me, but added that it would not have mattered if he had died, then began to talk about Ylen again.

"Who is Ylen?" I asked in exasperation.

He pressed a hand to his brow, and tried to clarify his thoughts. "My mind is confused . . . I cannot remember clearly," he said quietly. "Ylen . . . she is my wife. I suppose that is what you would call it. There is no formal marriage as in this world, but we are united inseparably. Then — then they sent me to search for the remedy, so we have been parted for a long, long time . . . Now she too has the *thrayn*."

"What is the *thrayn*?" I asked.

"*Thrayn* . . . ? A wasting disease for which there is no known cure."

"I have never heard of it," I pointed out.

"It is not of this era," was the mysterious reply.

Levison refused to enlighten me any more that night. He said he was tired and dispirited, and wanted to sleep. So I took my leave to make my way home, bewildered and worried. Hallucinations? Obviously. Aphinine was acknowledged to be allied to Indian hemp, and there was an undeniable similarity in physiological effects. I felt vaguely angry with Levison for being so foolish as to indulge in dope, for that was all this proving amounted to. He had not been secretive about it, admittedly, but it was plain that he had already acquired a strong addiction.

I could see no valid reason for his extreme concern over the creatures of his dream. Ylen could not possibly be anything more than an insubstantial creation of the subconscious mind. I was familiar with popular psychological jargon, and it seemed to me that, since Levison was a bachelor, this dream of his "wife" Ylen (not formally married as in this world, therefore symbolically illicit) might be in the nature of a Freudian wish-fulfillment. Then there was the disease, the *thrayn*, which could be interpreted as a symbol representing the forces of frustration which had caused him to remain a bachelor (perhaps his medical career, symbolized as a disease).

It seemed a logical explanation to me as I returned home in the cool night air, and secretly I felt rather proud of my attempt at psycho-analysis. I resolved to explain my conclusions to Levison the next time I saw him, and so rid him of his fantastic delusions. Lanoa, the evil river, the Pratyri from beyond the black peaks of Saakor fancy any sane person

believing that such things could really exist!

Three days later I received a long letter from Levison, written in his small, neat and almost feminine handwriting.

It commenced formally enough, with an apology for his "peculiar behavior," then continued as follows:

"I believe you are of the opinion that I was under the narcotic influence of aphinine. Admittedly I was, but there is more to it than that. I would like you to know the full details of my experiences, because you may be able to assist me, or at least settle my mind on the haunting question of how to inteprete these aphinine dreams.

"After you left I tried hard to recall all that had happened to me while I was under the influence of the drug. It was a painful and tedious process, but your shorthand record was helpful. During previous aphinine provings I had seen the valley, the river, and the mountains — always identical in every detail; but on this occasion I went further than ever before. I entered the village of the Lanoans.

"The place was deserted and silent. For a time I wondered if in fact everyone had died since my last visit, perhaps due to the ravages of the *thrayn*, or successful overwhelming assaults by the Pratyri. Above all I was anxious about Ylen.

"You must understand that this comprehensive knowledge of the Lanoans and their enviroment was there, in the back of my mind. I simply accepted it, and took it for granted. It was as though I was no longer Paul Levison, but Lodar, scientist of Lanoa. I had always been a Lanoan, and had all the memories and knowledge that one would expect. This world, and my present-day personality had become unreal — a half-remembered illusion.

"I walked noiselessly to a tall building in the center of the settlement that bore the insignia of the Supreme Council, and knocked loudly on the door. I sensed unseen eyes watching me from the shuttered windows of the houses around, but there was no sound.

"After a few seconds I knocked again.

"This time the door before me swung open with amazing swiftness, and I found myself facing three grim-faced men holding long daggers in their hands. Their expressions changed as they recognised me; and in a moment I was the center of an enthusiastic group of Lanoans, clapping me on the black and welcoming me home.

"After this initial warm reception, we went down the long carpeted corridor, and through a massive stone doorway into the Council Chamber itself. There were perhaps half-a-dozen people seated around a table, mostly Elders of the community. They greeted me in the same delighted manner. I turned to Thoa, the

aged but kindly President of the Council, and questioned him regarding the deserted aspect of the village. His reply was brief, but to the point.

" 'All day there has been a smoke haze over the Saakor peaks. You know what that means Lodar. The Pratyri are engaged in ritual ceremonies, and there will be the inevitable raid upon our people for human sacrifice. Hence the state of siege.'

" 'But I entered the village unchallenged,' I protested. 'Where are the sentries and the patrols?'

" 'There aren't any. Since you left us eight cycles ago, six out of every ten of our people have died of the *thrayn*. We are rapidly becoming an extinct race. We cannot spare lives to defend ourselves: we have to rely on barred doors and windows. We are completely and utterly outnumbered by the Pratyri, and all we can do is hide ourselves away from them. You see that things are very much worse now. But our real enemy is the *thrayn*. We can hold off the Pratyri, but not the virus.'

" 'And Ylen — how is she?'

"The old man did not reply. Instead he asked another question.

" 'Were you successful in your quest?'

"I shook my head wearily, then repeated my first question — 'Ylen — how is she?'

"He said very quietly: 'She is not very well, I fear. If you take my advice, Lodar, you will not disturb her — not yet . . .'

"A sudden wave of fear chilled me. I pictured Ylen, white and emaciated, victim of the *thrayn*, doomed to die a slow and painful death . . .

" 'Where is she?' I demanded, in a voice that betrayed my intense anxiety.

"Thoa said firmly — 'You must not see her yet.' There was finality in his voice. 'You may go to her later, after the Pratyri have come and gone.'

" 'I'm going now,' I insisted, but Thoa shook his head. 'You are too valuable a man to donate to the sacrificial fires of the Pratyri. You must wait. Ylen will be all right.'

" 'She has the *thrayn*?' I queried, knowing the answer intuitively.

" 'Yes,' said Thoa. 'She has the *thrayn*.'

"There was nothing I could do but wait for the dawn. The President had given an order, and I had to comply. It was a reasonable order, but I was not in a rational mood.

"After a while we retired to another room — a fortified cellar below the Council Chamber. The entrance was a massive trap-door in one corner of the Chamber, and we filed through, descending about twenty broad steps into a long low room fitted mainly as a dormitory, with tiered beds and retractable screens. About a dozen men and women were already there, all Councillors, attired in the brief white uniform which was the traditional official dress of Lanoa. I alone was unclad, but

sensed no embarrassment, since clothes were not considered essential, but merely useful. Later I was, in fact, provided with a uniform, mainly because the cold season was approaching, and the temperature dropped considerably during the night.

"The others greeted me heartily on my arrival, and plied me with questions. A woman I knew, named Rona, said: 'Tell us of your experiences in the other age, Lodar.'

" 'I remember little,' I replied. 'My mind is confused. I was a doctor, of course, but my medical training was of no avail. I discovered no cure for the *thrayn* — indeed, the virus was unknown in the age to which I was transferred.'

" 'Some of the other Seekers have come back, too,' said Rona. 'They all failed. One of them has since died of the *thrayn* — the irony of it!'

" 'It cannot be helped,' observed the President, then suddenly, I was aware that he was regarding me strangely. He said slowly: 'You have come back . . . *now*. That is wrong . . . impossible. The projector was not to return you until the tenth cycle, that is in two cycles from now. It makes a difference of about seven years in the more rapid time stream of the other age. How did you come back . . . ?'

"I struggled to think. 'Then the projector did not bring me back?'

" 'It could not.'

" 'Then something else . . . what was I doing in the other age? Some drug, I think, but it escapes me . . .'

"At this moment the discussion was interrupted by a long terrified scream from far away. A hush fell on the room. In the white light from the lamps all faces looked unusually pallid.

" 'Pratyri!' whispered the woman Rona.

"Then faintly, almost inaudibly, came the sound of pattering feet in the street above, punctuated by loud crashes and cries. In my mind's eye I saw the silent streets of the village suddenly filled with darting and scurrying pygmies, battering on doors and shutters, shrieking their hatred of the Lanoans, searching for human sacrifice with malignant energy.

"Then I thought of Ylen, somewhere out there, ill and defenseless. I pictured the Pratyri, with their grotesque iron-grey bodies dwarfed and shrunken — the wicked curved knifes, and the sadistic cruelty. I could not bear to contemplate what would happen if Ylen fell into their hands. My mind was made up. I arose slowly and deliberately, sensing within me an immense stubbornness and strength.

" 'I'm going out,' I stated flatly.

"And with that I leapt up the short flight of stairs to the heavy trap-door, struggled with the bolts, then, before anyone could stop me, had flung it open and swung

myself through into the Council Chamber.

"I straightened up and replaced the trap, blotting out the shouts of the others below, who had only just realized my intention. The noises in the street outside were increasing in volume. Silently I crossed to the shuttered window, and peered through an interstice.

"The night was filled with writhing bodies: the dull grey of the Pratyri, and now and then the limp bronze crimson-stained forms of Lanoans, dragged from houses where the barred doors had not been sufficiently strong to withstand the massed assault of the pygmies.

"Here courage alone was futile: cunning was needed. I made my way to the rear of the Council Hall, and glanced cautiously through a small window looking out onto a minor roadway. There was no fighting to be seen, but an occasional stunted figure flashed by, reconnoitering the byways of the village. I decided to take my chance here, so, carefully and soundlessly, I opened the rear door, and ventured out into the street.

"After I had locked the door behind me, I realized that I was unarmed. In my anxiety I had forgotten to take a sword or dagger. I cursed softly, but did not turn back.

"Then, skulking in the shadows, freezing at the slightest suspicious sound, taking infinite pains to remain undiscovered by the Pratyri, I made my way through the more unfrequented streets to the home of Ylen. There was only one dangerous encounter, when a bloated pygmy came at me from the shadow of a buttress, and ran a knife through my shoulder. In berserk fury I kicked him to death, but my action was noisy enough to attract the attention of others. I fled around a corner and, twisting and turning through a network of passages and avenues, gradually outdistanced my pursuers, for I had the advantage in length of leg.

"And very soon, exhausted and perspiring, I arrived at the house of Ylen, and banged urgently on the door. The place was unfortunately rather exposed, and my peremptory knocking attracted the attention of several prowling pygmies.

"I banged again — louder. 'Open, quickly, open!' I cried.

" 'Who is it?' came a voice that I recognized as that of her father.

"A dagger flashed past to stick, quivering, in the door.

" 'Lodar!' I shouted. 'Let me in.'

"The street seemed to be full of Pratyri now, yelling and running towards me. Knives flashed in the moonlight. Then the door swung open, and I flung myself into safety like a madman. As the old man rebolted the door, I asked breathlessly: 'Where is Ylen?'

"He led me to an inner room; and there she was, lying on a low bed against the far wall, smiling weakly at me. One glance took in

the shallow — almost yellow — complexion; the deep red-rimmed eyes; and the intense scarlet of the lips. There had been no mistakes: Ylen was in the grip of the *thrayn*.

"I crossed to her and embraced her. She cried for a while. I held her in my arms and looked at her, and was appalled at the change in her appearance.

" 'You are back already?' she asked eventually. Her voice was little more than a whisper.

"I nodded.

" 'But the projector . . . ?'

" 'Did not bring me back. I brought myself back.'

"She looked at me in wonderment. 'How?'

" 'I can't remember. Some drug — I think. I wish I knew.'

" 'The cure . . . ?'

"I stood up and crossed to the window. 'I shall have the cure soon,' I said, as confidently as I could. 'You will soon be well again, my Ylen.' But there was no conviction in my voice, and there swept over me at that moment a feeling of great futility — of complete uselessness. What was the use of fighting and resisting the Pratyri only to be struck down by an enemy more deadly and insidious. Soon all would succumb to the *thrayn*, and of the two deaths, massacre by the dwarfs from the Saakor mountains was at least the quicker and the more humane.

"Then suddenly there came a tremendous tattoo upon the street door, followed by a deafening crash. Ylen's father came into the room with drawn sword. 'They are coming,' he said quietly, staring at the passage which led to the door.

"More noise, like thunder and cannons intermingled, and the door creaked and splintered ominously.

" 'It will hold,' I said, mainly to reasure the others, if not myself. The old man handed me a sword, and with a confident smile at Ylen, I followed him into the passage.

"The door was thick and powerful, but it was taking a tremendous battering. I wondered how long it would survive, and whether we two would be able to hold back the hoardes of Pratyri that would come rushing through the gap if the door caved in . . . or whether the pygmies would give up, and go elsewhere in the hope of finding a door a little less resistant.

"Then as I stood there, a feeling of nausea overcame me. I staggered weakly, and leaned against the wall. My senses seemed to be leaving me: I was being sucked down — down, into a mighty whirlpool. I struggled towards the inner room, to see Ylen once again, but in vain. The passage, the old man, Lanoa, everything vanished, and I was engulfed in a sea of ebony . . .

"When consciousness returned I found myself once more in my Marle Street apartment, with you bending over me. The rest you know. The strychnine had coun-

teracted the effect of the aphinine, and had recalled me from Lanoa to this age again. I was no longer Lodar, but Paul Levison, doctor and homoeopath.

"I would like you to give the above record your earnest consideration. No doubt you will be inclined to dismiss it as a dream; but observe: although the story contains many fantastic features, as one might expect in a dream, yet there is no hint of illogicality — and dreams are invariably illogical. Furthermore, the after-effects of this dream are unique in my experience. Although I have taken no more aphinine since that evening, thus reluctantly breaking my proving time-table, I am still firmly convinced that Lanoa is a very real place, and that I am, in fact, Lodar, projected to this country at this time to discover, if possible, the cure for the incurable — the *thrayn*. I was not to return for another seven years, equivalent to a period of about eighteen months in Lanoan time, so the time scales differ relatively, as you can see.

"But the drug aphinine sent me there — back to Lanoa. It would seem that there is some curious relationship between aphinine and this country of my dream. Did aphinine liberate my astral body from its earthly shell, and transport it through the dimensions and time to the era and country of the bronze men and the Pratyri? If so, then is the action of the drug general, or exclusive. Would it release anybody's astral form, and would the sleeper be transported to Lanoa, as I was?

"I believe that I am a Seeker, and therefore returned naturally to Lanoa when in a discarnate state. But you yourself, not being a Seeker, would probably not visit Lanoa. Is this a true assumption? This is a question on which the reality of Lanoa clearly depends.

"I would like to settle this question once and for all, and would value your co-operation in this most important experiment. Would you care to call on me again at your earliest opportunity, and take a quantity of aphinine? There will be no danger: you will merely sleep and dream. But if you too dream of Lanoa, then its reality is established beyond all doubt. If you do not, then its reality is still open to question, even though I personally have no doubts whatsoever.

"One final point . . . aphinine, as I have already suggested, seems to be connected in some way with the place Lanoa. But I have discovered an even more vital connection. It is so important that I dare not tell you until I am positive. Perhaps when you come I shall know for certain . . .

"Your sincere friend, Paul Levison."

I read that letter through three times, and then decided that Levison was indeed the victim of a powerful delusion. He was a bachelor — that was the cause of

all the trouble. His dream of Ylen was, as I had theorized previously, in the nature of a wish-fulfilment (*I* have very strong leanings towards the Freudian school of psychology). This written account of the dream experience only confirmed my opinion.

The forces of frustration were now doubled. There was the *thrayn,* symbolising his medical career (conquest of the *thrayn* representing conquest of disease), and Ylen would represent ideal womanhood. Because of the *thrayn* he had been sent away from Ylen (as a Seeker), or interpreting — his career was responsible for keeping him separated from womanhood. In addition the *thrayn* was likely to kill Ylen (keep him a permanent bachelor), unless he could conquer the disease (break away from the absorption of his career). So far it was all very logical, and I felt well satisfied.

The second force of frustration was symbolized by the Pratyri, but here I was at a loss, for I could think of nothing that these pygmies could possibly represent; unless they stood for the scorn and criticism of his, Levison's, contemporaries with regard to his homoeopathic practice, which was often regarded as unorthodox. But the connection seemed more than a little obscure.

The tall peaks of the Saakor mountains provided another clue — obviously they were phallic symbols. But why? Did they symbolize emotional experiences of Levison's past life?

Eventually I gave up the problem in disgust. I felt convinced that Levison's dream could be explained quite rationally by any competent psycho-analyst; but my own knowledge of psychology was too superficial. I could make no further headway.

Nevertheless, I decided to visit Levison on the following Sunday, and argue him out of his delusion.

* * *

That night, on retiring to bed, I pondered over the problem of projection of the astral body. Levison and I had argued about this subject many times at the College. Frankly, I was sceptical. Science generally denied the existence of the astral body, etheric body, or any of its equivalents, and I felt inclined to agree with science. But Levison, I knew, scorned the orthodox. He was extremely interested in certain aspects of psychic research (I recalled his remark 'must tell Chibbett' while under the influence of aphinine), and apparently he was quite prepared to accept the hypothesis of the astral body. For myself — I persisted in my dogmatic denial with all the self-assurance of a person who knows little about a subject.

During the night I had a strange dream. It seemed that Levison came into my room, and in some way he was airy and wraith-like.

He stood at the foot of my bed and stared at me with strange intensity.

He did not speak, but I knew that he wanted me to go with him. I climbed slowly out of bed, at which he seemed to float upwards through the ceiling, beckoning me to follow. I tried to jump upwards after him, and to my surprise sailed gently through the air as though weightless. Instead of my head striking the ceiling, it passed through it, and very soon I was poised in the night air above the house-tops.

The scene changed. Like a dissolving view the city beneath vanished, to give way to unfamiliar outlines. Came the faint thunder of waves upon a distant shore. And then I was above a dark forest — floating like mist between the dark jewelled dome that was the sky and the sombre earth. A meteor whipped across the heavens, and I felt subdued.

Levison was beside me, and together we glided over that mystic country. Soon we came to a river, a black sinister ribbon twisting tortuously across the undulating ground; and later — a wooden bridge.

I recognized nothing, for no memories came to me in that dream. Everything was new — bizarre.

Levison was pointing into the distance, and following his finger, I saw on the horizon, outlined against the back-cloth of stars, a panorama of vertical mountainous crags. One, sharp and needle-like, jutted upwards like a pointing finger . . . a black granite finger.

We ascended higher into the sky, and the land beneath us shrunk until we could take in more of it. Now I could see beyond the mountains, into a country that appeared black and tan to my straining eyes. I tried to draw nearer, to find out more about the dark wilderness beyond the mountain barrier, but suddenly I was falling . . . falling. . . .

I awoke in bed, inexplicably terrified.

For a long time, as I lay there in the darkness, I was convinced that I had had a psychic experience. Levison had come to me while I was asleep and had commandeered my astral body. Together we had gone to the Valley of Lanoa, with its evil river and weird mountains. I had returned, and Levison. . . . . .

Unnerved, I told myself that there was such a place as Lanoa after all, and that in some unaccountable manner, under the guidance of Levison, I had bridged the intervening time and space. For a brief moment I had seen the valley of the bronze people, and the peaks and pointing finger of the Saakor range, birthplace of the river. And I had glimpsed the country of the Pratyri beyond the mountains. Everything corroborated Levison's detailed account, and my scepticism was badly shaken.

But as the minutes ticked by,

my perspective improved. I began to laugh at my earlier convictions, and decided that the experience had not been an "astral projection" at all, but an ordinary dream, caused by the stimulating events of the last few days, and in particular Levison's astounding letter. To clinch the matter, I remembered that my last thoughts on going to sleep that night had been on the subject of astral projection. I had refuted it mentally, and had fallen asleep. Naturally, I had dreamed about the topic of my thoughts, and the memory of Levison's experiences under the influence of aphinine had determined the trend of my own dream. The whole thing was perfectly normal and of no significance.

Pleased with my rationalization of the "psychic experience", I went to sleep once more, but resolved to see Levision the very next day instead of on Sunday.

I kept to my word, and on the following evening found myself ringing the doorbell of the house in Marle Street once more. As on the previous occasion, the pretty receptionist conducted me to Levison's apartment; but this time he answered the door to my first knock.

I was shocked and horrified at his appearance. His face was sallow — indeed yellow; his eyes — red-rimmed and bloodshot; his lips — crimson and inflamed. In his eyes there was a far-away dreamy expression, as though he were engrossed in abstract thought.

He ushered me into the apartment, saying "I was expecting you today."

"You have been taking aphinine again!", I said accusingly.

He laughed — triumphantly. "Yes! I have been taking aphinine again. . . . thank God! Look. . . ."

He pointed to his red eyes and lips, then poked a finger at his cheek. The flesh remained indented, filling out very slowly, like putty. I was filled with something akin to nausea, combined with a genuine concern for my friend.

"Look!", he repeated. He bared his chest, and I saw, just below the right shoulder, a purple patch that glistened with exuded serum.

"You know what it is?", he demanded.

A fantastic word leapt into my mind, but I rejected it instantly. How could it possibly be the *thrayn?* There was no such place as Lanoa, no such person as Ylen, no such disease as. . . .

"Well?", he insisted, his eyes burning fiercely.

I forced out the impossible word.

He shook his head. "No. It is not the *thrayn.* It is aphinine poisoning."

I echoed his words in dismay.

"My proving of aphinine is at an end", he continued. "Last night I decided to take a final

friend. It seemed as though the drug had, quite apart from its temporary narcotics effect, permanently upset the balance of his mind. Indian hemp, which was a close relative of aphinine, was known to cause a form of insanity if indulged in to excess. Levison was rapidly becoming a clinical case — needing the care and attention of a doctor himself. He had become an addict. The explanation that he had discovered the cure for the *thrayn* was, of course, an example of psychological rationalization, as was the whole fabrication of the Lanoan state — an intricate excuse to justify continued taking of the drug.

It was subtle, but simple. In his capacity as homoeopath it was his duty (as he saw it) to "prove" aphinine in order to secure a record of the symptom-pattern; but the drug had taken a hold upon him, so that he no longer took it from a sense of duty, but because of physiological craving and compulsion. Due to some flaw in his mind of a schizophrenic nature, he had subconsciously found it necessary to invent this second personality named Lodar, and involve him in an environment and plot which would justify taking more and more aphinine, without shocking the dictates of his conscience.

I saw the whole psychological mechanism only too clearly, but the problem was . . . would Levison himself appreciate it? I felt very doubtful. He would cling to his system of delusions — his mythology of Lanoa — because it afforded a reason for taking more dope. But clearly it was up to me to make some attempt to make him see reason, before the aphinine experiment got out of hand.

"Look here, Paul", I began, hesitantly. "Forget about Lanoa and Ylen for the moment. Let's look at this thing from a purely materialistic viewpoint. You've been taking increasing amounts of a habit-forming narcotic over a period of time, and to any outside person, such as myself, it is fairly obvious that this stuff, this aphinine, is beginning to get a hold upon you. You're becoming an addict, old man. You're getting to like it."

"Nonsense", was his reply. "I hate it, detest it and despise it — apart from its medicinal and homoeopathic uses."

"Nevertheless, you have been under the influence of this narcotic at regular intervals. It must be in your system to some extent."

"I have not become an addict".

I remembered my previous interpretation of the jagged vertical peaks of the Saakor mountains as phallic symbols, and decided to approach the Freudian angle tactfully.

"You were never married, were you, Levison?", I asked.

"So . . . ?"

I looked at his intense, almost fanatical, face, and suddenly realized the futility of attempting to

dose of fifteen grains. These symptoms were half-formed, even then. Today they were a thousand times worse. The homoeopathic symptom-record of aphinine is now complete."

"You're killing yourself, Paul", I pointed out.

He ignored me, and went on: "Last night I took my final and maximum dose of aphinine. Did you dream last night. *Did you . . . ?*"

I sat down and stared hard at him. There was an urgent sincerity in his voice that perturbed me. "Yes", I said slowly, "I did dream . . but it was only a dream. . . ."

The other laughed sardonically. "Still the same old sceptical Cleary. You won't believe anything until it is objective beyond all possible doubt — unless it can be touched, weighed and measured. What did you dream about?"

I hesitated. My scepticism was beginning to waver once more, as it always did in Levison's presence. But there was nothing I could do except tell the truth. I related the story of the dream exactly as it had occurred, while he listened eagerly. When I had finished he said:

"I had to do it. I had to convince you. I had to prove to you that Lanoa was a real place. I had to destroy your disbelief. I took you to Lanoa last night. I intended to go on to the village, and find Ylen, but the strain of taking you with me was more than I could stand. I was forced to give up, and returned . . . here.

"Then, thinking and pondering over the problem of aphinine throughout the night and today, and observing the severe symptoms of poisoning that were developing, I suddenly and unexpectedly found the key to the whole problem. You see, I should never have gone back to Lanoa when I did, for I was not recalled by the projector. I am ordained to remain here, as Dr. Levison, until I find the cure for the *thrayn,* or failing that, until I am recalled by the projector at the end of the tenth cycle. Well — I've found it! That's why I went back!"

I stared at him blankly.

"Don't you understand?", he asked. "I've found it — the remedy for the *thrayn!*"

"You've found it?", I repeated uncomprehendingly.

"Aphinine poisoning", he said, very slowly and distinctly, "produces symptoms identical with those of the *thrayn.* The homoeopathic law says — let likes be cured by likes. Therefore, aphinine is the natural remedy for the *thrayn.* So you see, my mission here is now accomplished, and I can return once more, for the last time, to my beloved Ylen, if the *thrayn* and the Pratyri have not already killed her."

For the first time since I had known him I began to have serious doubts about the sanity of my

explain the connection between his bachelordom and the dream of Lanoa. He would laugh in that superior way of his. Besides, my own belief in the infallibility of Freud was not nearly so steadfast now. There was something about Levison, a kind of pervading aura or magnetism, that tended to stifle cynicism.

"Forget it", I said. "I was trying to find a rational explanation for your belief in Lanoa."

"Psychology?"

I nodded.

"Freud?"

I nodded again. I saw the inevitable glitter of sardonic amusement appear in his eyes. "So Lanoa is a fantasy of repressed sexuality?", he asked.

I did not reply, for Freud seemed at that moment very remote and insignificant. The possibility that there might be some element of truth in the Lanoa story possessed my mind. I recalled the offer he had made in his letter.

"You told me that you would give me a dose of aphinine", I reminded him.

"If you wish it. It doesn't matter to me any more, since whether the result is positive or negative, the reality of Lanoa is now unquestionable. But it might convince you, if you are capable of being convinced."

So I took my place in the armchair in the darkened corner of the room — where Levison had sat on the previous occasion. I had to overcome a certain degree of apprehension, for I had developed a definite antipathy, almost a fear, of the drug; but I felt that the experiment had to be made in order to determine once and for all whether Lanoa existed or not. Levison's own experiences had been conclusive — to himself, but not to me. I knew that once I left him and had time to think, my old scepticism would return, and I would again seek to find a rational explanation for all that had occurred.

Here then was the supreme test. If aphinine failed to take me to Lanoa, then I had no valid reason to believe in the place.

Levison brought a quantity of the powder from his surgery, dissolved it in a little water, and gave it to me to swallow. It was extremely bitter, with an astringent quality that put a layer of fur on my teeth. I lay back and waited for results, aware that Levison was watching me intently. Soon a languor crept over my body, and a peculiar tingling sensation became evident in my hands and feet. The throbbing of my heart became a deafening roar in my ears. As though from an infinite distance I heard Levison's voice saying: "Speak out your symptoms . . . tell me what's happening."

I struggled to overcome a powerful disinclination to talk. "I see brilliant flashes of color", I said, but I could hardly hear my own voice. "The room has gone — nothing left but shapes and lights.

I can hear nothing but my own heart."

And then I experienced the surprising sensation of being lifted out of my own body. I seemed to float upwards, as though borne on a cloud, and all sounds ceased. My lips formed phrases, yet no sound seemed to emerge from them. I looked down at my body, and found that it was gone.

I was an invisible entity floating idly in a space of many colors, but there was no purpose in my drifting, no destination in my mind. I visualized Lanoa, and willed myself there — within view of the black river and the peaks of the Saakor, but nothing happened. My isolation was complete.

The shapes and shadows swirled, and took the form of a fantasia of creatures and forms of a highly pleasurable nature. There were women, nymphs, quaint indescribable creatures with cloven hoofs, and impressionist patterns and designs, all moving and dissolving rhythmically like some surrealist ballet. Throughout there was a potent sensual and aphrodisiac atmosphere, and I allowed myself to be swept dreamily through these pleasant vales of imagery, savoring unusual emotions.

Soon the visions dimmed, whirled about in darkening confusion, and then were resolved into the drab gloom of Levison's study. Vaguely irritated that the beautiful idyll should have ended so soon, I turned to face him. He was looking eagerly at me.

"You went there, then?"

"Where?". My thoughts were incoherent and I found difficulty in concentrating.

"Lanoa."

Gradually my mind settled down. "Lanoa. . . ? No, I did not go there. I tried, but it didn't work. I had beautiful dreams about fauns, and centaurs, and maidens. . . ."

"It was a failure", Levison interrupted, his voice echoing his disappointment. "But what else could I expect? You are not a Seeker — you are not of Lanoa. You could not possibly find your way there without my guidance. You might as well have taken opium for all the effect it had."

"It was wonderful. . . .", I said dreamily.

"Pull yourself together", he remonstrated. "You have just had your first experience of dope. . . . your first, and, I hope, your last. You had pleasant dreams, that's all. You did not go to Lanoa, which proves exactly nothing!"

He gave me something to drink, probably a stimulant of some sort, and my lassitude was swiftly dispersed. I felt my scepticism returning once again, reinforced this time by my personal experience of aphinine. "There can be no such place as Lanoa", I declared, "otherwise I should have gone there — as you did."

"Not necessarily", he replied.

"After all, I am from Lanoa — and you are not."

"But," I argued, "you did not know that you were a Lanoan until you took aphinine. Surely that is sufficient proof that your valley of Lanoa, your Pratyri, and your Ylen are all one big delusion."

I half expected him to show some annoyance, but instead he smiled softly and mystically. "I forgot my true mission in this era . or at least, I was not fully conscious of it. But all my life I have been seeking something — I knew not what. I believe I was drawn towards aphinine. It was inevitable that I should find it in time. Aphinine brought me face to face with reality — the fundamental truth that I am a Lanoan, and my work is finished. I have the remedy for the *thrayn*. I cannot take aphinine back with me when I return for the last time, but somewhere on this planet, in my own age, is the land we know as India. We shall find it, and secure some of this priceless dream-weed. And then we shall be able to fight the *thrayn*, and having recovered our racial strength, fight and destroy the Pratyri, and achieve our destiny."

He spoke with such dreadful sincerity that for a moment I was carried away by the melodramatic sentiment of his words. But in the aftermath of silence cold common-sense again rejected his statements as fantastic. Levison was insane.

I left him soon after, warning him to have nothing more to do with aphinine. He made no comment, but simply smiled, a wry hesitant smile. We said goodbye, and he shook my hand as though he were going on a long, long journey.

I did not go home. Instead I went to the nearest police-station, and asked the police to accompany me to Dr. Levison's home, as I feared that he intended to commit suicide. We arrived too late. The doctor lay huddled up in his chair, and he was quite dead. On the table was a small green bottle labeled aphinine, and it was empty.

The inquest was boresome and unpleasant. There had been an autopsy, of course, and there was no doubt about the cause of death. The mystery was, why should Dr. Levison, an apparently successful physician, with no worries or financial embarrassment, become addicted to a narcotic drug and take his own life? How could I explain my friend's belief in his own delusion; his conviction that he was a Seeker from Lanoa, and that he had a mission to perform in this age, remote from his own? I decided that I would say nothing. I told them, quite simply, that Levison had been proving aphinine in the manner of homoeopathy, and taken excessive quantities, resulting in an acquired addiction, and had finally killed himself by overindulgence. The coroner brought in a verdict of 'death by narcotic

poisoning resulting from addiction to dangerous drugs.'

* * * * *

Months passed by. The strange affair of Dr. Paul Levison gradually dropped out of my mind, and I had not the slightest intention of ever writing an account of the case, apart from a few paragraphs in the scientific magazine which I was editing. Then two things happened.

The first was another dream of Lanoa. The circumstances were similar to those on the occasion of my first dream, when Levison claimed that he had "conducted" me in astral form to the valley of the bronze men. I had fallen asleep, when suddenly, I seemed to be wide awake and aware that Levison was standing at the foot of the bed, staring at me.

I was distinctly frightened, for this could not be explained away with words such as 'telepathy' or 'sympathetic clairvoyance'. I knew I was awake — or so it seemed to me at the time; yet Levison was dead and buried, and I could see him in my room in the early hours of the morning.

He beckoned to me, and I arose, impelled by some force stronger than my fear. As before, we passed through the roof of the house, floating far above the city. The scene melted into the mysterious wooded valley of Lanoa. Dawn was suffusing into the ebony sky, and the pointing finger of the Sakor was silhouetted against a pale aureate glow. The river shimmered wtih radiance, as though it were a stream of liquid bronze.

At the wooden bridge we turned off to the left, passing over the tree tops, gradually losing height, until we came upon the village of Lanoa. It was a miniature metropolis — I had not realized that before — a symphony in white stone and the metallic blue of chrome alloy. The buildings were low and cubic, but one, taller than the others, bore a strange insignia in gold above the door. This was obviously the Council Chamber.

People walked to and fro in the streets — tall handsome copper-skinned people, attired in cool white uniforms. At first there were only a mere handful; but as the sun rose higher, and the dawn was transformed into brilliant day, more and more people left their homes, and made for a zone of large buildings beyond the perimeter of the town, where clearly there was industry and work to be done.

I was curious to see the machinery and technical processes of Lanoa, for up to this time I had received the impression that these people were not greatly advanced in the objective sciences, though culturally they had reached a high level. But Levison did not make for the industrial belt. Instead, we veered towards a long white glass paneled build-

ing set in a dispersed position in what appeared to be a cultivated park. We passed through the door. Beyond the vestibule was a ward — immensely large and airy — containing innumerable beds on which lay citizens of Lanoa, pale despite their tan, with the characteristic red eyes and crimson lips of the *thrayn*.

We passed down the ward, unheard and unseen except to each other. At the end was a door, which opened onto a flight of steps leading down to another vast chamber, illuminated by brilliant strip lighting that gave the illusion of sunlight. White-smocked men moved about among benches that were littered with a profusion of glittering apparatus and crystalline glassware. It was a laboratory, spotless, odorless, and functioning with noiseless efficiency.

On and on, past busy scientists, research workers, bacteriologists, until we came to a large annex, even more brilliantly lit, with a humid hothouse atmosphere. Here, lining the walls were countless tiers of rectangular trays, arranged in series after the fashion of an incubator. In them grew a myriad of tiny dark green plants bearing minute crimson flowers.

My mind spun back in an attempt to recall where I had seen this species of plant before. . . surely *it was* the Indian weed, Aphina equesitina, source of the alkaloid aphinine? I remembered the color-photograph in the *Medical Review*, illustrating Levison's article.

All this time, Levison had remained silent. Indeed, during the whole of this nocturnal visit to Lanoa, he did not speak once. Such sounds as I heard lacked what is called the reality-tone — they were rather sensed — as in a dream.

We left the hospital and research center after I had identified the little flowering herb, and followed the perimeter of the town. It was now day in Lanoa, and already the sun was shining with increasing intensity, causing the white architecture to shimmer in a morning heat haze. We approached a circular construction of vast dimensions, which proved to be a kind of bathing pool. The great domed roof was a screen on which a hidden projector flung a curtain of color, of moving shapes and abstract images that were reflected in the water below, transforming it into a molten rainbow of fluid light. Some of the people of Lanoa were bathing in the pool, completely naked, looking extremely lithe and healthy.

We passed around the marbled edge until we came to a woman, poised for a dive, and here Levison stopped, and held out a hand, as though to say "Here she is". The woman was beautiful, with raven-black hair and brown eyes, and a body that was the essence of suppleness and grace. She dived into the water with scarcely a

ripple and swam away like an eel, perfectly at home in the element. I knew that this was Ylen — Levison's Lanoan wife. She had clearly survived the ravages of the *thrayn* and the Pratyri.

We left the pool, and wandered from the town to the borders of the forest. There Levison regarded me sadly, and I knew that this was the moment for parting, perhaps for ever, and I was filled with regret, for I longed to see more of Lanoa and my friend.

But some force seemed to tug at my shoulders — to lift me upwards. Levison waved farewell as I floated aloft, far above the valley and the snow-white houses of Lanoa. I waved in return, and took one last look around.

The erect finger of the Saakor range seemed strangely bold and defiant, I thought. Beyond the mountains a smoke haze ascended in a misty column to the sky . . . perhaps the smoke of the Pratyri. . . ? Vague anxiety filled my mind as I soared higher and farther away. The *thrayn* had been conquered, but what of the natural enemy of the Lanoans? Would the racial conflict go on until the end of time, or were the strengthened and rejuvenated bronze men already acquiring ascendancy over the pygmies from the mountains. . . ?

I had no time to ponder over the matter, for suddenly I was falling into a vast shaft of darkness — to awaken in my own bedroom once more.

The experience impressed me greatly, but as before, I was at a loss to know whether I had actually gone to Lanoa with Paul Levison, or whether it had merely been a vivid dream. There was no tangible proof. It had all the indications of a psychotic dream evoked by a subconscious mind that had been too greatly concerned with the problem of Levison. But supposing it had actually been an astral-projection? Had I in truth visited the valley of Lanoa, and seen Levison and Ylen — his wife — alive and well? What, in fact, was truth?

The thing baffled me — it was too subtle to bear contemplation. Man, it seems, has an inherent love of the fantastic, yet he feels compelled to adopt 'rational' explanations for phenomena of a supernormal character that do not fall into known and classified categories. And in time I came to regard my second visit to Lanoa as a dream, pure and simple.

I would like to leave this story like that — to finish inconclusively, leaving the reader to form his own conclusions as to the reality of Lanoa. The facts given above are correct to the best of my knowledge. Any London newspaper file will reveal the record of Dr. Paul Levison's tragic death; and any reference library will provide an abundance of literature and works of reference demonstrating the truth of the principles of homoeopathy as stated. There is no objective proof

of Lanoa, though I have been told that in dreams one may occasionally catch brief glimpses of that dark wooded valley resting in a sombre stillness disturbed only by the distant thunder of waves on a unseen shore; and the towering mountains of Saakor, with the black crawling waters of the river spanned by the wooden bridge. . But who is to say that this dream world is any more real than the myriad other places of the night?

That is as I should like to finish, but there remains the other incident to which I referred earlier, which may have a very important bearing on the reality, or otherwise, of Lanoa.

This manuscript was completed, and typed out in full more or less as you have read it, up to this point, when an aged patient of Dr. Levison's who was also a friend of mine asked permission to read the story. He had been a great friend of Levison's, and was a widely traveled man, having in his youth (he is now eighty-five) sailed over most of the world in one of the last of the old sailing ships.

So I gave him the manuscript, asking him to return it as soon as possible. This he did on the very next day. He seemed highly excited, and had a strange tale to relate which he requested that I should add to the record in order to complete the story of Lanoa.

It would appear that he had, in his younger days, been an able seaman aboard the "Minitonka" — a small tramp steamer employed in the export of cinnamon from the South Seas. One day a typhoon blew the ship miles off its course, and severely damaged the rigging. They found themselves north of the Marquesas group, and close to a small island called Kaluiki.

It was necessary to carry out repairs, and take in further freshwater supply to allow for the delay inevitably caused by the storm. Consequently, on the following day, an exploring party went ashore on Kaluiki, to find water and some fresh fruit. My acquaintance was among them.

They progressed inland through tropical verdure, and after struggling up the sides of a jungle-covered mountain range, saw — beyond and ahead — a valley.

It was a place of great beauty, and the faint breezes that came from the farther side bore traces of aromatic and exotic perfumes. From the mountain summit they could hear the remote roar of the waves breaking on the beach.

The old sailor was most emphatic about the details of that valley. They went well into it, he said, for many miles, and eventually came out upon the banks of a great sluggish river that rippled and swirled in the grip of unseen currents like black oil. The river had its source, so far as they could ascertain, in a ridge of high land many miles away. A strange fea-

ture of this range was a tall sharp peak projecting vertically upwards like a needle. The mountains were black in color, and apparently devoid of vegetation.

Although they followed the river for a great distance towards its source they came across no bridge of any kind, nor did they see any sign of human habitation whatsoever. Finally the party was forced to turn back, for the search for water seemed futile. The waters of the river were bitter — so bitter as to be useless for drinking purposes.

That is the substance of the old sailor's story. There is no corroboration that a sailing ship named "Minitonka" ever did visit the island of Kaluiki due to the vagaries of a typhoon, or for any other reason; but my acquaintance is the sort of man you instinctively take on trust. I am loth to believe that this is just a 'mariner's tale'. For one thing, it is lacking in the type of imaginary detail and incident that one might expect. It is a simple and unvarnished account, and rings true.

But the question is — can his memory be trusted after so many years? My acquaintance is eighty-five now. He estimates that the landing on Kaluiki occurred during his early twenties. There has been a gap of some sixty years — a long, long time for any man to remember details, and it is the details which matter.

With my fondness for 'rational explanations', I feel inclined to believe that the old sailor's hazy memory was decidedly tinged and distorted by the actual story which he had just read, and Kaluiki became, by the superimposition of small details here and there, Lanoa.

However, he himself is positive that Kaluiki and Lanoa are one and the same place, and sometimes my scepticism gives way a little, and I idly speculate on the mystery of Paul Levison. Kaluiki, it seems, is uninhabited at the present time. Has Levison gone, then, to a Lanoa of the far distant future, where the bronze men are the descendants of present-day man, and the culture of that age is a simplified refinement of our own? Or has he returned to the remote past, to an age and culture long buried beneath the soil and the vegetation? Time would eradicate all traces of civilization: even the wooden bridge would crumble to dust as the millennia swept by. And what of the Pratyri? Are they representative of a lower form of humanity destined to split away from the evolving human species in time to come; or were they a sub-species long ago extinct?

For myself, I prefer to think that Levison returned to a Lanoa of the future, whose rough embryo lies even now in the midst of the Pacific waters; and that the noble bronze people may one day inherit this earth of ours, and put an end to disease and conflict.

THE INDIVIDUALIST

by Russ Winterbotham

I WAS eating Chow Moon with nodules and rice at the Paradise cafe in Syrtis, the best little city on Mars, and up to my table bobbed Hudu, the proprietor.

Hudu knows all the traveling men from earth and they all know him. He's quite a character and he'll surprise you sometimes by giving you an order for something you never expected to sell. Like the chewing gum I sold the last trip out. Nobody on Mars chews gum, but Hudu bought five cases of it.

It's hard to tell whether he's a knave or a humanitarian; but whichever it is, he's made quite a pile of money at it. Maybe he's a good businessman, but I couldn't quite understand why he bought that gum, when nobody on Mars chews it.

"You are an unhappy man," Hudu said, in his clipped accent.

That wasn't hard to guess, but Hudu would have guessed it anyhow. He instinctively knew when one of his customers wasn't enjoying himself and he always took steps to correct it. It was his boast that a visit to the Paradise cafe was an adventure. That no one ever left the place without learning something, or at least getting in a better frame of mind. That's why I had come here.

"Sure I'm unhappy," I said. "I've got eight more weeks to spend on Mars. And do you know what my boss wants me to push? Chewing gum! So far as I know, nobody on Mars uses gum."

"But I bought some. Therefore isn't it reasonable to assume that I have a use for it?"

Yes, I'd figured he must have. Martians have a funny way of doing things. They never do anything directly or to the point. They always do it the hard way. For example, a postal system is one of the things they borrowed from the earth. But what did they do first? They built all the postoffices and then established the system. Some of the postoffices were too large, some too small.

They also tell about the murder case they had in one of those backwoods Martian towns. They built a courthouse to try the suspect, before they even decided whom to arrest. The last thing they did was to elect a sheriff to arrest the suspect and by that time the man they wanted to arrest had died of old age.

You just can't beat Martians for doing things the hard way. But they're individualists and the longer you live there, the more fun you have. They tell me.

"You probably have a use for gum, but I'll bet you didn't buy it to chew," I said. "And for the life of me, I can't think of anything

else you can do with a stick of chewing gum."

Hudu turned down the corners of his mouth and looked sad, but I wasn't fooled. Right in the back of his brain he was plotting a way to make me happy. I was a challenge. He wouldn't let anybody leave the Paradise cafe unhappy.

"So this is why you are gloomy!" he said with a sigh. "Earthmen do not look deeply for happiness. You always judge things by what they seem, not for what they are beneath the surface."

"Please go away," I pleaded. "I don't want to hear that routine again. I know. Earthmen are boors. They are uncouth, shallow, money-mad, and amoral. They are damn fools and sentimental idiots. And a million other things. I've heard them all and I don't want to hear them again."

"You heard them," said Hudu. "Not from my lips, but from yours. I was about to say, that no one goes from my door without feeling a little better than he did when he came in. You will be a difficult case to handle."

He shuffled off, with his derby hat a little askew. Like all Martians, Hudu regarded clothes as something incidental. Tonight he wore a strong man's tiger skin, along with his derby. Tomorrow he might wear a tuxedo to cut his lawn and a pair of levis to a formal wedding. Most Martians bought their apparel on whim and wore them alphabetically, I suppose. When it came time to wear a particular outfit, it was worn, no matter what the occasion.

I signaled the waiter for a menu in order to pick out my dessert and I was studying, trying to decide between a Neptune Supreme and an Asteroid Royale, when the hostess paused before my table, and motioned to the chair opposite.

"Would you object sharing your table with someone else?" she asked.

"Not at all," I said, without thinking. "I'm almost finished anyhow."

The hostess smiled her thanks, walked off and returned presently with a young woman, one of the few Martian redheads I've ever seen. She barely smiled at me as she seated herself. She was wearing what was once known as a Bikini on the earth. On Mars they call it the Grand Canal.

She was nice enough to be a dessert, but I ordered an Asteroid Royale anyhow, and I was waiting for it when suddenly I realized that this was one of Hudu's ideas. Although he'd never tried it on me, I'd heard that as a last resort Hudu would very often call upon a woman's charm to make a particularly difficult customer happy. It was said that he kept a large staff of young women for this very purpose – sort of high grade B-girls, you might say.

There have been times when I might have welcomed this kind of a trick. But this was my night to be irritated by the thought that

Hudu was trying to trick me into being happy.

"What's good on the menu?" the redhead asked, smiling.

After all, I don't go around insulting pretty girls, so I gave her a civil answer, resolving to keep the war strictly between Hudu and myself. "The Chow Moon was very good," I said, "but Hudu's Saturn Sub Gum is always good, and he can't be beaten on Space Foo Yung, or Milky Way Ling Chi."

"I think I'll have the Stew Orion," she said.

"Isn't that ad libbing?" I asked. "Stick to the script, sister. Agree with me. Get me in good humor."

"Well!" The word was half-way between a sniff and a snort. "I don't quite understand!"

"Take one of my suggestions," I said, "or Hudu may fire you. In case you don't know, he's your boss, the man who sent you over to cheer me up."

Her eyes flashed angrily. Good for me. I'd made her mad. Being played for a sucker always brought out the worst in me. I'd even insulted a pretty girl. Insulted, my eye. I should claim the insult.

"I see what you mean," she said. "You believe I am a B-girl, or a — a pickup!"

"Isn't it rather obvious?"

"Sir," she said haughtily, "My name is Arlez. Does that mean anything to you?"

Did it? I practically crawled under the table. Arlez was the name of the Martian representative of Sol Trading. I'd practically talked myself out of a job!

"I agreed to sit at your table," she said, "because the hostess said you were one of our employees. Now, I prefer to sit with someone else."

She raised her hand to call the hostess, who fortunately didn't see her. She prepared to rise, but I started fixing fences. I reached across the table and clasped her hand.

"Forgive me, Miss Arlez," I said. "I thought it was one of Hudu's tricks. Please do not take me seriously. I'm not myself tonight." I took my hand away and added: "You stay. I'll go."

Instantly her attitude changed. It's hard to understand these Martians, their moods change so swiftly that half the time you think they're not genuine moods at all. I still don't know.

She looked at the empty dishes around me. "You have not had dessert and coffee yet," she said. "Please stay and talk to me."

The war was over, and I was glad for chance to talk and clear myself. Very quickly we were laughing. I told her my name, Vic Musy, and that I was supposed to push chewing gum on Mars.

"You mean that silly order of Hudu's got you in a jam?" she laughed. "I'll write the home office and explain it."

"What in the world is he using gum for?" I asked.

"One of his inventions probably," Arlez said. "Whatever he's

doing with it, I'm sure he's not chewing it."

"Inventions?" This was a new angle on Hudu for me.

"Hudu is a great inventor," she said. There was almost reverence in her voice. "Whenever he wants to do something impossible, he invents a machine to do it. He does whatever he likes."

"If he does," I said, "he's unique in the universe."

"Oh, quite unique," she said, as if there were any qualifications to being unique. "He's an individualist."

The waiter brought my Planetarium Coffee and Asteroid Royale.

"Do you wonder how we prepare coffee on Mars?" she asked.

"Yes, I do," I said, knowing that coffee must be grown in high altitudes in the tropics. "It has such a distinctive flavor."

"We make it chemically from a machine Hudu invented," she said.

"I had no idea Martians were so clever," I said. "I thought it was imported from the earth or Venus."

"That is the trouble with earthmen," said a voice at my elbow. "They never look beneath the surface."

I turned and saw Hudu grinning at my right. He was repititious.

"Hello, Cousin Hudu," said Arlez.

All I could say was "Huh?"

Both Hudu and Arlez laughed. I was angry for a moment, then I saw the humor of it and I laughed too.

"He thought I was one of your B-girls," Arlez said. "He almost insulted me, but afterwards he became quite nice."

"Vic is very nice, for an earthman," said Hudu.

"Arlez has been telling me about your inventions," I said.

"But I didn't tell him about your supreme achievements," she said.

"How could you?" asked Hudu, "since you have never taken the slightest interest in it, you couldn't tell him much."

"I know that alongside other works of intelligent beings, it stands alone," she said. "Cousin Hudu is the only *living* man who has done mechanically what living things are best fitted for."

"Thinking?" I asked. And I knew I was wrong. It is only higher animals that think. "Living?"

"Someday thinking machines will be common," said Hudu. "And machines will live. My machine has done more."

"More than living and thinking?" I asked.

"My machine has not only determined the purpose of death, but it has accomplished that purpose," he said.

If an earthman went around talking like that, we'd put him in the laughing academy. But this was on Mars.

I looked up at his grinning

face. I saw his chest rise and fall as he breathed. Involuntarily I reached out, grasped his arm and felt his pulse throbbing beneath his skin.

"You are not dead," I told him. "So how can you say you have found the purpose of death? You must die to know."

"Cousin Hudu is an individualist," said Arlez.

"That lends nothing to the solution of life and death," I said. "What does your machine do? Tell me in words I can understand. I'm only an earthman and I never could understand a Martian's enigmatic ways."

"It is very simple," said Hudu. "I wanted to find out about death. I built a tool for that purpose. I have the machine in a place you may visit, if you are interested."

"Am I interested! Of course. Right away?"

Hudu laughed. "Finish your meal. Then Arlez and I will show you a part of Mars you never dreamed existed."

I was too excited to finish my Asteroid Royale, but I did sip the rest of Planetarium Coffee, because I needed strength. Arlez, on the other hand, ate slowly without the slightest trace of excitement.

"Have you seen his machine?" I asked her.

She shook her head. "No one has seen it except Hudu himself."

"I feel greatly honored that I should be the first to see," I said. "It must be because I filled that order for chewing gum."

"The gum has nothing to do with it," she said. "No one else wanted to see it. Only a crazy earthman would be interested in such a contraption."

"Hudu was interested. He invented the doggoned thing."

"Cousin Hudu is an individualist."

The waiter, dressed in a silk hat and grass skirt, placed the checks in front of me and I paid for both meals, feeling a momentary pang about being taken by one of Hudu's tricks. Arlez may not have been a professional B-girl, but she certainly had been sent to my table.

As I dropped a five-credit tip on the tray, Hudu appeared out of nowhere, smiling benignly in his inscrutible Martian way.

"You are in better spirits?" he asked, triumphantly.

"Yes, you rat," I said. "But it may not last. Witnessing the spectacle of man's triumph over death may not be uplifting —"

"I said nothing about a triumph," said Hudu. "I simply said that I had accomplished death's purpose. Nevertheless, you have eaten and you feel better. You came to the Paradise cafe, and the cafe has done its duty. Now for adventure!"

I took Arlez by the arm. "Whether I have an adventure or not, whether the evening is a success or a failure, meeting a beauti-

ful woman is always worth the time."

"Spoken as only an earthman can speak," said Hudu. "Come, I will show you the machine."

He took us into the kitchen. It was weird. There was not a human being in the place. Food was prepared, cooked and made ready for serving by machines. Waiters bobbed in at intervals, picked up orders and trudged off again. They placed orders simply by pressing buttons, or combinations of buttons, on the wall.

"The kitchen is one of my simpler inventions," Hudu explained. "Years ago I began making things to do various types of work. They were complex at first and they progressed to the increasingly simple."

He led us from the kitchen into a long passage, at the end of which was an elevator. We stepped into this, Hudu touched a button and were whisked downward.

"I told you, Vic," said Hudu, "that you should peer beneath the surface to see Mars as it really is."

A prickly sensation began to creep up my spine and I realized that in all the times I had met him, I had never seen the real Hudu. There was something about him, as impenetrable as life itself, that shaded understanding.

We stepped from the elevator and walked down a corridor. Before one door he paused and motioned for me to look inside. There was a huge machine that seemed to work like a grinding apparatus.

"It is chewing your gum," he said.

"Chewing my gum?" I could not understand.

"There is no use for an unchewed stick of gum," said Hudu. "But once chewed, gum may be used as putty, as a substitute for paste, for many other things. I have a special use for it."

"Okay," I sighed. "Let's have it."

"I place little wads of it under my tables and chairs so earthmen will feel at home."

We passed on down the corridor and I wondered if perhaps I could interest theater owners in Hudu's idea. Putting gum in Martian movie house seats might not be a bad idea for places that catered to nostalgic patrons. Hudu continued his monologue:

"I invented many things, until at last I began to wonder about the purpose of life. But life is a transitory thing. Why not study something permanent, like death. I resolved to find the purpose of death, and so I built a machine that would reveal it."

We reached the end of a corridor and he swung open a pair of doors. Faintly to my ears came a thunderous noise, a noise like a thousand waterfalls, of a hundred large cities. We passed through the doors, walked a few paces and paused while Hudu unlocked another set of doors. As they swung open, I realized why

there had been two sets. They had insulated the rest of the place against the thunderous noise of the machine.

Hudu opened the final door and the noise of ten thousand thunders assaulted our ears. We stepped out on a sort of balcony and, looking down, I saw what could only be the machine.

It was built in a room fully three hundred feet long, a hundred wide and almost as high. The machine almost filled this cavernous chamber and it was running full blast, roaring, grinding and vibrating.

Vacuum tubes as large as upended locomotives lit the chamber with a blazing glare and gave forth the heat of a furnace. Huge pistons rose and fell and electric sparks leaped from electrodes in jagged flashes. Governors twirled and gears meshed and rumbled. The smell was of ozone and steam.

Behind this fascinating whirl of movement I caught a glimpse of the wall, the familiar leaded housing of an atomic fission chamber, which gave forth the power for this monstrous mechanism.

A hundred questions flashed through my mind, but I could not ask a one. The noise from this mechanical Vesuvius made even thinking a task. Arlez clapped her hands to her ears and I utilized the old spaceman's trick of opening my mouth to equalize the pressure on both sides of my eardrums. But Hudu stood like a boy watching a spaceship in the clouds. Arms at his sides, pride in his stance he surveyed his gargantuan creation.

At last he turned to me, still like a child, as if he wanted praise for a youthful accomplishment. I could only smile, for even a twenty-one-gun salute, fired in a salvo, could not have been heard above the din.

I gestured toward the door, a bit frantically perhaps, but I was risking my eardrums to stand here. Arlez was trembling and her face was white. She too had seen enough.

Hudu nodded, took the young woman by the arm, and led us back through the insulated chamber to the elevators. At last we could hear, but for a moment no one spoke.

"That was the machine," said Hudu.

"I guessed it," I said, sarcastically. "You told us that it duplicates the purpose of death. But exactly what does it produce?"

"Nothing," said Hudu.

"What does it do?" asked Arlez.

"Nothing," said Hudu. "Absolutely nothing. Death produces nothing and does nothing. That is exactly what my machine does."

"It's a waste of engineering genius!" I exclaimed.

"It's blasphemy!" said Arlez.

"You asked me what the machine did, and I told you. You assumed it had no purpose. But the machine has a purpose, just as death has a purpose, although

these things accomplish nothing."

"All right," I said. "What is its purpose?"

"To bring happiness," said Hudu.

"*You* don't bring happiness with death, and you can't bring happiness with horsepower," I said.

"Earthmen have a saying," spoke Hudu. " 'Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.' In such a manner does death bring happiness. Happiness comes from the joy of living. Eat, drink and be merry in the Paradise cafe, for beneath it is a machine like death."

"Uncle," said Arlez, and I started with astonishment, "you are mad."

He smiled and looked at me and saw the question in my eyes.

"Yes, Vic," he said. "I am her uncle."

"So," I said, "you *did* send her to my table!"

He nodded. Arlez pulled him aside and stepped in front of me. "You must believe that I had nothing to do with it," she said. "He tricked me too! He deliberately brought us together, for what purpose I do not know."

Hudu shrugged and spread his hands. "It seemed like a good idea to make two people a little happier," he said. "It was like the machine. I did not know, when I built it, whether it would be useful." He laughed. "I just like to invent things."

"He *is* crazy," said Arlez. She paused, then said: "This is humiliating. You do believe that I did not arrange this — this pickup, don't you, Vic?"

"Of course," I said. "I believe you." I turned to Hudu. "As for me, I did not mind it. But it was not a kind thing to do to your niece."

Hudu seemed puzzled, then his face brightened. "Oh," he said. "You mean she could do better? Ah, I thought of that, then I realized that you strike a good average."

He was infuriating. "I should punch you in the nose," I said.

"For introducing you to a pretty girl?" asked Hudu. He bowed slightly. "I'm afraid it is you who are crazy. Please punch me, if you wish. No one leaves the Paradise cafe unhappy."

Arlez put her hands to her face. A sound like a sob escaped her, and for a moment I thought she was weeping. Then I saw her shoulders shake with a movement that does not come with crying, and I heard the sound again. It was not a sob. She was choking with laughter. Suddenly I also was laughing. Hudu chuckled softly and I forgot I had just threatened to punch him in the nose.

"You lunatic!" Arlez managed to say to Hudu.

"You repeat yourself, my dear," said he.

"She's right, Hudu," I told him. "You're the only man anywhere who'd waste a fortune on a machine that does nothing —"

"It *did* nothing," he said, amending my statement. "I'll admit that until today, it never did anything but run, which is to say exist. But it did something today."

He was looking at Arlez. I looked at her and I realized that the machine had brought the two of us together. Yes, the machine had done something. I would be on Mars eight weeks longer and I would see her many times, I hoped. Perhaps that would not be the end of our acquaintance, for I had hopes of never stopping.

But —

"Good God, Hudu," I muttered, "whatever your machine did, it didn't take a million horsepower to do!"

Again that enigmatic shrug and widespread hands. "Why take chances?" said he. "Besides, I like big machines, even for small things."

On the other hand, what he had done with the machine was no small thing. As I stood there, looking at Arlez, I thought the machine was a trifle small and what it did was something big.

I do not know what prompted Hudu to build the machine. He loved machines, and perhaps deep in his mind he had an idea of using it the way he did — to bring two people together. But in Hudu's own words, he was the kind of man who does little things in a big way.

And that shows the pitfalls of analysis. I can think of no better use for a million horsepower than to manufacture romance. Love is a big thing. Oh yes, the purpose of death? Maybe it has something to do with romance too.

POSTED

by MARK MALLORY

The alien took only moderate pains to keep his ship from being spotted. He landed in a hilly wooded area and immediately set his scanners for a routine check of the planet's development. It had been but ten years since the last check of Terra but the planet was progressing nicely and undoubtedly soon would be ripe for conquest.

He let the scanner run over several of the larger cities, probed here, there, followed for a time an aircraft, checked the railroads for estimated tonnage.

They were coming along very nicely indeed.

He was somewhat surprised when a human figure detached itself from the shadows of the trees and approached his craft casually. But, if necessary, he could destroy the other; meanwhile a bit of personal prying into the human's brain might be rewarding in results.

The human said, telepathically, "You're too late, you know. You should have taken over after your last check. Now you will never succeed."

The alien looked at him for long shocked moments.

This was unbelievable. But there was no immediate need for violence and there was great need for information.

"I don't know what you mean," he replied.

The human smiled wryly. "I mean you are from Deneb. Following a policy your race has continued for literally millions of our Earth years, you left a few score humanoid slaves on this planet long, long ago. Slowly through the ages they developed, slowly they multiplied and conquered the Earth. Now you plan to return and again assert authority over them." The human shook its head. "This time you fail."

A yellowish flush suffused the alien's face. "How do you know all this?"

The other shook his head in denial of answer.

The alien said, "Ten years ago this planet had barely discovered atomic power, now you speak as though you were my equal." He sneered.

"More, much more than your equal, Denebian," the human said softly. "I have no desire to destroy you, but if you make the move toward your weapon which you are

now planning, it will be necessary."

"Slave!" the alien hissed and his tentacle darted for the weapon.

Only seconds later there were but smoldering, twisted bits of metal where the space scout had squatted.

The human looked thoughtfully at the wreckage. "They waited too long, this time," he murmured. "It possibly never occurred to their leaders that if man ever developed time travel he would return and police his space-time continuum. We of a thousand years in the future have no desire to have Denebians take over Earth and humanity in the year 1956."

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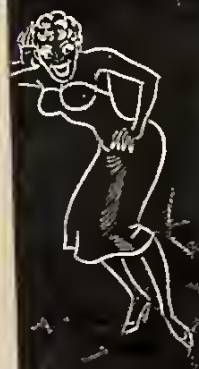

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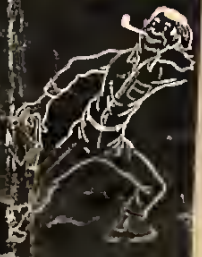

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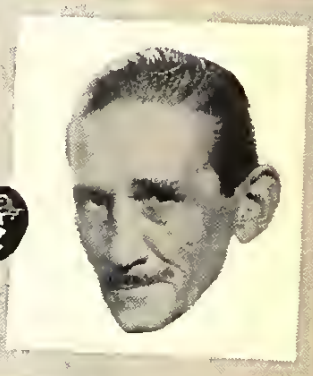

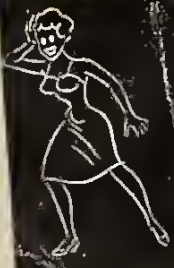

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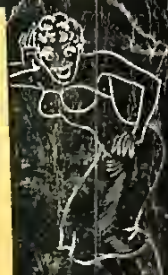

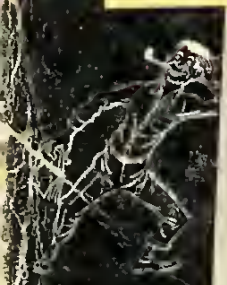

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